

Jordan Times

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General hints that Israel may target Hizbollah leaders

BEIRUT (AP) — The commander of Israeli forces in southern Lebanon hinted Wednesday that Israel would target guerrilla leaders in future. Brig. Gen. Eli Amitai told officers of the Israeli-backed militia, South Lebanon Army, that Israel was going to go further and harder to retaliate for guerrilla attacks, the militia's press office said in a statement. "The rules of the game have changed. We will hit back two-fold [after guerrilla attacks] and our hand will reach the terrorists and their leaders wherever they are," Amitai said, according to the militia statement. Amitai said Hizbollah guerrillas had "crossed the red line" when they killed his predecessor, Brigadier General Erez Gerstein.

Israeli police recommend court action over embassy shooting

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israeli police said Wednesday they have recommended court action against the security chief at the country's embassy in Amman following the shooting death of a guard. Shurek Gefen, 23, died of his injuries eight days ago after being shot in what Israeli officials said was an accident during a shooting exercise in the embassy courtyard. Police said they had wrapped up their investigation into the incident and recommended that the Jerusalem prosecutor take action against the embassy's security chief, whose identity was not disclosed. Israel's internal security service Shin Bet has opened its own inquiry into the circumstances of the shooting.

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Egyptian runs off with \$110 million from bank fraud

CAIRO (AP) — An Egyptian fishing tycoon has absconded with \$110 million in loans from banks, police said Wednesday. Mark Adel Fahmy borrowed the money from four banks to finance the expansion of his business and then disappeared, police said. Nicknamed the King of Tuna, Fahmy was a major figure in the fishing industry in the Mediterranean port of Alexandria. Police said he received the credits without providing proper security.

Colombia rebels bomb towns, free prisoners

BOGOTA (R) — Leftist rebels freed 60 convicts from a prison, raided banks and bombarded three towns with home-made missiles as fighting in south-west Colombia killed at least five people, authorities said Wednesday. All three attacks were carried out in Cauca province late on Tuesday by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the hemisphere's oldest and largest insurgent force. Tuesday's heaviest fighting occurred in Santander de Quilichao, Cauca's second-largest town with some 40,000 inhabitants, an army spokesman said. FARC guerrillas there destroyed five banks after looting the vaults, and ruined explosives-packed gas cylinders on police barracks.

Former Nazi freed pending trial

STUTTGART (AP) — A former Nazi soldier who confessed to personally shooting some 500 Nazi prisoners has been freed pending trial next month, authorities said Wednesday. Alfons Goetzfried, 79, made the confession after being arrested last March 3. He faces trial April 27 on charges of being an accessory to murder for assisting in the mass evacuation of some 17,000 prisoners at the Majdanek concentration camp in eastern Poland in November 1943, most of them Jews. The 500 murders that he has confessed to also took place in the same month.

260 million-year-old fossil found

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — South African scientists have found the fossil of a 260-million-year-old plant-eater, which they say is the most primitive member of its species yet discovered. The discovery was announced Wednesday by the University of the Witwatersrand, which co-headed the research team that found the fossil near Williston in the country's Northern Province. The fossil is the skull of an animal belonging to the anodontosaurs, which were the earth's dominant land creatures some 250 million years ago, before the appearance of dinosaurs.

Nationalists hurl food at filmmaker

MOSCOW (R) — Two nationalist youths, one armed with a gas pistol, were arrested after throwing food at Oscar-winning Russian film director Nikita Mikhalkov during a lecture on Wednesday, Interfax news agency said. NTV television showed security guards at Moscow's Central House of Cinematography wrestling with the two youths and confiscating the pistol. It said they had thrown eggs or tomatoes — witnesses were not sure which — at Mikhalkov. "That's what it's like to be a Russian filmmaker in Russia!" an apparently agitated Mikhalkov was shown telling the crowd after the incident.

King, Cohen discuss Iraq, U.S. military aid to Jordan

By Francesca Ciriaci

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah and U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen on Wednesday discussed the continuing crisis over Iraq and ways to improve the readiness of the Kingdom's ground forces.

"I indicated to King Abdullah that the U.S. stands firmly behind Jordan and that we are moving forward with an economic package," Cohen said after an hour-and-a-half meeting and lunch with King Abdullah.

An additional \$300 million package, two-thirds in military aid and the rest in economic assistance, was announced by U.S. President Bill Clinton following the death of King Hussein last month and is currently before Congress. The U.S. already provides the Kingdom with \$225 million annually.

"We believe that economic stability and progress in Jordan is key to stability throughout the region," Cohen told reporters before his departure from Marka airport.

Reports from Washington last week said congressional infighting could delay the bill, which is attached to other key assistance to Central America. But U.S. officials earlier this week expressed confidence that the legislation would go through.

The Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported that King Abdullah voiced appreciation for the U.S. administration and Congress' support to Jordan's development, stressing that combating poverty and unemployment is the main target of government efforts.

King Abdullah also emphasised Jordan's determination to modernise its Armed Forces so that it could play "its crucial



His Majesty King Abdullah II escorts U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen upon their arrival Wednesday at the Royal Palace (AFP photo)

role in maintaining regional peace," Petra said.

Reporters travelling with Cohen quoted unnamed U.S. officials as saying that the U.S. will help Jordan improve its army readiness and boost anti-tank forces with U.S. TOW-2 and Dragon anti-tank missiles, modern all-terrain vehicles and night-vision equipment.

Reuters news agency quoted a senior U.S. defence official as saying the Kingdom plans to make its ground forces more mobile to protect its borders and contain smuggling and infiltration from neighbouring countries.

Cohen firmly denied reports published in yesterday's local press that the U.S. had plans to split up Iraq.

"I also made clear to the King that the stories about the U.S. supporting the breakup of Iraq are false and without any

foundation," he told journalists.

Al Arab Al Yawm on Wednesday talked of an "American plan" to overthrow the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein by July, and said a new leadership in Baghdad would accept a confederation with a Kurdish state to be established in the north of the country.

"We are not supporting any concept of a federation [with a Kurdish state] and we support the continued territorial integrity of Iraq," Cohen affirmed.

"So those reports that have surfaced here in Jordan and elsewhere are, in fact, without any substance or foundation," he said.

However, Cohen reiterated Washington's belief that "as long as Saddam Hussein remains in power, the Iraqi people will not be able to

enjoy the benefits of peace and stability."

He said the United Nations recently filed a report according to which the Iraqi regime stored some \$275 million worth of medical supplies and medicines in warehouses, refusing to distribute them to the people.

"So the suffering that is now visited upon the Iraqi people is due to the fact that Saddam has the ability to distribute these medicines and has refused to do so," Cohen charged.

Jordan has long affirmed its rejection of the use of force to settle the Iraqi question, while insisting that Baghdad comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions and the suffering of the Iraqi people be alleviated.

(Continued on page 2)

King, Arafat hold talks on faltering peace process

PNA leader reiterates stand on May 4 date

By Saad G. Hattar

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah held talks in Amman Wednesday with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who reiterated his resolve to declare a Palestinian state by May 4.

"The fourth of May target is quite important," Arafat was quoted as saying by the Jordan News Agency, Petra. "It is rather an eventuality for the Palestinian-Israeli [peace] accords which should be respected."

Meanwhile, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's number two in the chain of command, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), denied an Associated Press report which

reported that King Abdullah urged Arafat not to declare a Palestinian state on May 4. "The Jordanian Monarch never made such a statement," said Abu Mazen, who attended the talks. "Neither Jordan nor

Egypt tried to convince us of anything," Abu Mazen told the Jordan Times. "We consult with our Arab brethren but eventually they accept our decision."

The Palestinian leader, who visited Cairo earlier this week and met with the Egyptian and Libyan leaders, has embarked on a regional tour ahead of his visit to Washington, scheduled for March 23.

His tour aims at mustering support for his plan to declare a Palestinian state by May 4, the initial date for winding up the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Jordanian officials have privately been lukewarm to the idea of a unilateral declaration, fearing that it could further erode an already faltering peace process. They are concerned that such a move, coming only two weeks before elections in Israel, could ultimately lead to the victory of anti-peace politicians.

The United States, the European Union and Egypt have reportedly been trying to coax Arafat into postponing the declaration until after the Israeli elections, slated for May 17.

The Palestinian leader has indicated on several occasions that he might delay the declaration if he received a number of assurances from Israel and the international community. They include a complete freeze on settlement expansion in the West Bank and the implementation of the Wye agreement, according to Palestinian sources.

During Arafat's brief visit to Amman, King Abdullah and the PNA president held a tete-a-tete followed by broader talks with senior aides. "The talks covered the peace process and the hurdles facing its progress, notably on the Palestinian-Israeli track," Petra said.

(Continued on page 2)

King meets with Kuwaiti investment group officials, Syriac patriarch

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Wednesday received representatives of a Kuwaiti investment group, who offered their condolences on the passing away of King Hussein.

During the meeting, King Abdullah and the visitors discussed Kuwaiti investment in Jordan and means of boosting it in several projects and sectors.

The King expressed satisfaction with the level of joint cooperation, particularly in

economic and development fields.

In order to encourage investment, King Abdullah stressed that Jordan will facilitate regulations for Kuwaiti investors.

Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabariti attended the meeting.

Also Wednesday, King Abdullah received the head of the Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch, Patriarch Ignatius I, who offered his condolences on the passing away of King Hussein. King Abdullah

expressed appreciation for the Patriarch and his denomination.

King Abdullah on Wednesday recognised a number of graduates of the King Al Hussein Bin Ali Brigade. The King, who was received by HRH Prince Talal Ben Mohammad, the King's advisor for national security affairs and the State Security Council rapporteur, attended training shows conducted by the graduates and the Royal Special Forces.

Parliament rejects premier's resignation from Lower House

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Parliament on Wednesday rejected the principle of separating the executive from the legislative branches by overwhelmingly voting against the resignation of Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh as a deputy in the Lower House.

Rawabdeh, who was appointed Thursday as prime minister replacing Fayez Tarawneh, submitted his resignation to the 80-member chamber and urged his colleagues to accept it.

"I find myself compelled to submit my resignation hoping that you would accept it," Rawabdeh wrote in his resignation letter, which was rejected by 59 lawmakers and approved by only four deputies of the 67 who attended the session.

The Lower House's internal regulations stipulate that the resignation of any of its members receive the approval of two-thirds of the chamber.

Following the appointment of Tarawneh in August 1998, four of his ministers, who were senators, submitted their resignations, which were approved by the Upper House.

Although the Constitution does not prevent deputies from holding Cabinet posts, the late

King Hussein had urged that the legislative and executive powers remain separate.

During Wednesday's session, deputies said Rawabdeh's resignation could set a precedent preventing Parliament members from taking government portfolios.

They said that Rawabdeh's resignation did not include sufficient justifications.

Rawabdeh, who won a seat in the 1997 parliamentary elections in the northern governorate of Irbid, ruled out speculation that his resignation was a signal that Parliament would soon be dissolved.

The 22-member Cabinet does not include any other deputies.

Deputy Fawaz Zou'bi described the appointment of Rawabdeh as premier as a "reward" to the Lower House and urged his colleagues to reject the resignation.

Rawabdeh's position as "the head of the government will serve the interests of Parliament and the Cabinet," said Zou'bi, a deputy also representing Irbid.

Deputy Salameh Hyari, who was among the four lawmakers who supported the resignation, urged his colleagues to approve the request because "it was Rawabdeh's desire and we should respect and approve his wish."

Arab houses demolished, Jewish settlement left intact

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — Fearing a showdown with Jewish settlers, Israel's prime minister halted the dismantlement of an illegal Jewish settlement, officials said Wednesday, even though two Palestinian homes were razed to the ground a day earlier.

A call Tuesday to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from Education Minister Yitzhak Levy, who represents the Jewish settler movement, stopped the army from removing a mobile home, a wooden shack and a few water tanks,

planted by Jewish settlers on a rocky West Bank hilltop, Levy's aide Yitzhak Rath said.

"I must be a prophet. As soon as I heard that there was political pressure, I said there is no way this will be carried out," said a senior Israeli army official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

On Tuesday, the Israeli army demolished two Palestinian homes in Arab east Jerusalem which were slated to be destroyed as part of a deal in which the settlement was to be removed on the same day.

"While the settler community is left to flourish, the Palestinian development is being intentionally stifled," said Yoav Haas, an Israeli human rights activist.

According to a report issued by the Israeli committee against house demolitions Wednesday, Israel has demolished 6,000 Palestinian homes affecting some 30,000 Palestinians, since occupying the West Bank in 1967.

Over the same period, 180 Jewish settlements have been built on the West Bank, including 13 new settlements since the October signing of a U.S.-brokered Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. Shortly after the signing, Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon called on the settlers to "grab the hill-tops."

Peter Lerner, spokesman for the Israeli military government in the West Bank, called the committee's figures "fictitious."

Hill 777 was slated for removal because it was built outside the planning scheme of the nearby settlement of Itamar, Lerner said.

David Bar-Ilan, a senior advisor to Netanyahu, said that it is possible that the hill's future will be brought before another hearing. "I am sure once the determination is reached about the legality... proper action will be taken."

Settlers at Hill 777 plan to build a 30-family community on the site. Settlers aim to cement Israel's presence in the West Bank in order to prevent the land from going to the Palestinians, who hope to establish an independent state there.

Two Palestinians killed by police in riots against death sentence

RAFAH (AFP) — Palestinian police killed two teenagers and wounded three other people Wednesday in rioting that erupted after a local man was condemned to death for slaying a policeman, witnesses said.

Relatives and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights identified the dead youths as Ala' Al Hams and Khamis Mahmoud Salama, both 17. They were among hundreds of people protesting in the Yabna refugee camp near here after a security court in Gaza City condemned a local resident, Ra'd Al Attar, to death for the Feb. 1 killing of a policeman in Rafah.

Attar, 25, a member of a Palestinian security force, was accused of acting as a double agent for the Islamic group Hamas, the main movement opposed to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and its peace accords with Israel.

An associate of Attar, Mohammad Abu Shamallah, 25, was sentenced to life in prison and a third man, Osama Abu Tahar, 24, was

jailed for 15 years at hard labour for involvement in the shooting.

It was the first time the PNA has handed down the death sentence against a suspected member of Hamas, acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement.

In Yabna, police opened fire when hundreds of protesters pelted them with stones and blocked roads with burning tires to protest the sentences, witnesses said.

Police quickly withdrew from the camp streets after the shooting, in which three persons were also wounded, one of them a 10-year-old boy.

But 1,000 people in a funeral procession for Hams stoned local police stations when the cortege passed by, prompting officers inside to fire in the air. Further unrest was feared following the burials.

According to the PNA, Attar, Abu Shamallah and Abu Tahar were recruited into the police three years ago after declaring they had quit the armed wing of Hamas, Izzedin Al Qassam.



Palestinian youths in the south Gaza town of Rafah stone a Palestinian police station Wednesday after hearing that Ra'd Attar, a Rafah resident, had been sentenced to death by a Palestinian court for his role in the death of a Palestinian security agent (AP photo)

secretly continued working for Hamas and when they were discovered and agents moved in to arrest them in Rafah on Feb. 1, they shot and

killed a captain in the Palestinian internal security service, Rafi Judeh.

Two children were also run over and killed by the three

suspects as they tried to escape arrest in a car chase across the Gaza Strip.

(Continued on page 2)

President Khatami to meet Pope

VATICAN CITY (R) — Iranian President Mohammad Khatami takes his revolution of openness to the Vatican on Thursday for a historic meeting with Pope John Paul II.

Making the first state visit to the West by an Iranian president since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Khatami also becomes Iran's most senior religious leader to visit the Pope.

Since his election in 1997, Khatami, a moderate Shiite Muslim cleric and scholar of Western philosophy, has often called for a "dialogue of civilisations."

He perhaps will find no more fitting a place for that than at the Vatican, a cradle of Christian culture.

Since there are no major outstanding problems between the Vatican and Iran, whose only 13,000 Roman Catholics would fit into a Vatican hall, the visit is expected to be more one

of sweeping symbolism than substance.

The Vatican wants Iran, which has vast influence in the Muslim World, to open up more to the West, disown international terrorism and improve its human rights record.

"The meeting between the Iranian president and the Pope is of primary importance for dialogue between Islam and Christianity," Archbishop Romeo Panciroli, the Vatican's envoy to Tehran, told Fides, the news agency of the Vatican's missionary arm.

"Iran is a leader of the Islamic World, with a great influence over the Middle East," Khatami will be the first president of the 55-nation Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) to meet the pontiff, Panciroli said.

"The significance of this meeting for relations between the two religions is truly great," he said.

Relations between Catholicism and Islam around the world are mixed. Unlike Catholicism, Islam has no central structure and inter-faith relations can be good in one nation, bad in another.

Relations between Muslims and the Christian minority in Iran are generally good, but officials hope the meeting between the Pope and Khatami will have broader, long-term results.

"A meeting of this kind does not bear immediate fruit but in the long term it creates a fertile ground for dialogue. There is a change of attitude towards Christians which leads one to be hopeful," Panciroli said.

In an interview with Reuters, Iran's Ambassador to the Vatican Mohammad Hadi Abedekhodai said Iran was certainly opening up to the West but the West was also rediscovering Iran.

"The West certainly has realised that in the Middle East

Iran is a great country endowed with precious resources and great potential in an area that is geographically strategic and very politically and socially important," he said. "This is why the West wants to improve relations with it."

"Today, the countries of the world intend to establish more relations with Iran, because they have understood the importance of this nation," said Abedekhodai, an Islamic theologian.

The exiled opposition National Council of Resistance of Iran wrote to the Pope asking him not to meet Khatami and listing 3,208 political prisoners it says have been killed in Iran.

The Vatican's position is that the Pope will talk to even the most controversial figures and use the opportunity to discuss delicate issues such as human rights.



A plume of black smoke rises from a yellow taxi cab moments after an explosion outside a shopping centre in Istanbul Wednesday, which killed one person. Police said the blast that tore apart a yellow taxi cab and killed the driver and injured six others, was the result of a time bomb (Reuters photo)

Israelis see turning point in election of Arab Miss Israel

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israelis from across the political spectrum hailed on Wednesday the election of the first Arab woman as Miss Israel, saying the choice proved that Jews and Arabs can live together.

"This is a clear manifestation of equality and cooperation between Jews and Arabs in Israel," said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sarah in a statement issued after the election Tuesday evening of Rana Raslan as Miss Israel.

"We are proud that Rana will shortly represent Israel all over the world," they said.

Taleb A. Sanaa, an Arab Israeli member of parliament,

found himself in rare agreement with the right-wing premier, whose headline stance in peace talks with the Palestinians is generally viewed as having soured Arab-Jewish relations.

"I was very excited when Rana got the title," he said. "This is a symbolic and historic event which proves that the feeling of alienation between Jews and Arabs is decreasing."

Of Pines, a deputy from the opposition Labour Party, said Raslan's election "shows how mature Israeli society is." Pines, a top model turned cosmetics magnate who is running for a seat in parliament in May elec-

tions, said the election of Raslan "is a message of peace and reconciliation with the Arab World."

Rosenblum, who was a jury member in the Miss Israel contest, went on to suggest Raslan's victory should also send a message to Syria "that we must resume peace negotiations" broken off three years ago.

Raslan, 21, from the mixed Jewish-Arab city of Haifa in northern Israel, was previously the beauty queen of Israel's million-strong Arab minority.

She succeeds Israeli Linor Abargil, 18, who was crowned Miss World in November and has been in the news for pressing charges

against an Israeli man who allegedly raped her just weeks before the beauty contest.

In a radio interview Wednesday, Raslan said "it's not important whether I'm Arab or Jewish, we must show the world that we can live together because there is no difference between Arabs and Jews, we are all human."

Arab Israelis, who make up 18 per cent of the population, elect members to parliament but complain of economic and social discrimination which has left their communities underdeveloped in terms of infrastructure, education and job possibilities.

King, Arafat hold talks on faltering peace process

(Continued from page 1)

King Abdullah underlined Jordan's support for "our Palestinian brethren" and expressed his concern over the faltering peace process, according to the agency.

The King said he was worried about the failure "to implement the Wye River" accord, which was signed in Washington last December by Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Brokered by Clinton and the late King Hussein, the Wye River accord provided for redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank in return for PNA security guarantees.

Arafat placed the blame squarely on Israel, deep in an internal elections imbroglio,

for failing to implement the latest peace deal. But he stressed, however, that the PNA would pursue consultations and contacts with the United States in a bid to unlock the stalemate.

"Arafat briefed King Abdullah on the agenda of his forthcoming visit to Washington, in which he is due to hold crucial talks with Clinton, Petra said.

The Palestinian leader also held talks with Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, who stressed the need for inter-Arab coordination ahead of Arafat's talks with Clinton.

Petra said they agreed to hold a tripartite Jordanian-Palestinian-Egyptian meeting in Amman "within the next few days" in an effort to sup-

port the Palestinian leadership. Jordan and Egypt are the only two Arab states to have struck peace treaties with Israel.

During their talks, the King and Arafat stressed the need to bolster Jordanian-Palestinian ties on all levels, notably in the field of trade. The King called for removing the "barriers" hindering the flow of goods between the two markets.

Jordan and the PNA have repeatedly accused Israel of imposing administrative and security restrictions which limit the flow of Jordanian goods into the self-rule markets.

According to official figures, Jordan exported in 1998 goods worth less than \$25

million to the self-rule areas, compared to Israeli exports to Palestinian markets of nearly \$2 billion in the same year.

Five years after it signed the Oslo agreement with the Palestinians, Israel is still in control of the two bridges linking Jordan with the West Bank.

Arafat's visit to Jordan Wednesday was his first since he attended the funeral of King Hussein on Feb. 8.

A few days after the funeral Arafat reiterated his offer to form a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation.

Jordan dismissed the proposal then as premature and stressed that such a formula could only see the light after the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

King, Cohen discuss Iraq, U.S. military aid to Jordan

(Continued from page 1)

King Abdullah has voiced the Kingdom's determination not to allow any party to use its territory as a "springboard" for interference in the internal affairs of neighbouring countries.

Jordan's stand on Iraq stems from the conviction that any change in Iraq must be decided by the Iraqi people, officials have said. They have privately expressed scepticism about the ability

of the Iraqi opposition based abroad to effect change in Iraq, saying it was not fully inclusive.

On the Middle East peace process, Cohen said: "It is something that the U.S. feels very committed to, and I know the Jordanians are very interested in."

The U.S. defence secretary, who placed a wreath on the grave of King Hussein, arrived here from Kuwait, following a tour of six Gulf states that diplomats said was

aimed at drumming up support for the now daily U.S. air strikes against Iraq.

He was expected in Cairo later on Wednesday, and in Israel today, completing his nine-nation tour that started last week.

Cohen's tour came under attack from the Gulf press, vocally critical of operation "Desert Fox." Qatar on Tuesday bluntly asked Cohen to stop the air strikes and allow the U.N. to resolve the nine-year-old Iraqi crisis.

Two Palestinians killed in riots

(Continued from page 1)

Hamas officials insist the three quit the organisation and that the Rafah shootout was the result of a dispute between rival branches of the Palestinian security apparatus.

Wednesday's sentences were handed down after an unusually open two-week trial in the PNA security court, which normally issues judgements following snap,

closed door hearings.

Relatives of Attar broke down after the announcement of his condemnation.

The death sentence has to be approved by PNA President Yasser Arafat, who has raised a storm of protest from human rights groups in recent months by authorising the executions of three Palestinian security officers convicted of murder.

Palestinian military courts

have handed down 25 death sentences since the autonomy government was created in 1994.

But Arafat has only signed the death warrants against three of the condemned — two brothers who worked in a Palestinian security unit and murdered two other men in a clan feud last August and a police colonel executed last month for raping a six-year-old boy.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 477311-19
PROGRAMME TWO
19:10News headlines
19:35Doc. — Perspective
20:00 News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)
20:30 Programme on the late His Majesty King Hussein
21:00 Islamic History in Jordan
21:30On the Banks of Jordan
22:00News in English
22:10 Doc. — National Geographic
23:00News in Arabic (Channel 2 links up with channel 1)

PRAYER TIMES

04:31Fajr
05:48(Sunrise) Dhuha
11:46Dhuhr
15:07Asr
17:44Maghreb
19:00Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifeh, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 4622366
Anglican Church Tel. 4624853/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 5811295
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440
Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138
Church of Presentation, Sweifeh Tel. 5920146
The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757
The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190
Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679
The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052
The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331
The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775261

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Temperatures are expected to rise slightly with skies partly cloudy, and winds northwesterly to northeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman05/17
Aqaba11/26
Deserts04/20
Jordan Valley11/25

Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 15, Aqaba 25.
Humidity readings: Amman

40 per cent, Aqaba 25 per cent.
Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:
Ajloun04/12
Jerash06/17
Um Qays06/17
Madaba06/16
Petra05/17
Dead Sea11/22

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Fakher Bilbeisi5522233
Dr. Adnan Zaghoul4898140
Dr. Hani Al Ahmad4394336
Dr. Abdul Majid Sha'ar4391405

AMMAN:
Firas Pharmacy5661912
Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730
Mayadah Pharmacy5537004
Ruka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:
Dr. Issam Salih03246858
Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)75360

ZARQA:
Dr. Zubour Qadi05906066
Palestine Pharmacy05983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue4630341
Civil Defence Emergency199
Rescue Police (02) 4621111, 4637777
Fire Brigade4671701
Blood Bank4775121
Highway Police5343402
Traffic office4896390
Public Security Dept. 4630321
Hotel Complaints5605800
Price Complaints5661176
Water & Sewerage Complaints 4897467
Amman Municipality Complaints4787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)121
Overseas Calls0132
Central Amman Telephone Repairs4623101
Abdali Tel. Repairs5661101
Jordan Television4773111
Radio Jordan4774111
Water Authority5680100
J. Electricity Authority 5815615
Electric Power Co.4636381
RJ Flight Information 44-53200
Queen Alia Int. Airport44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery5921199
The Islamic, Abdi5666131/7
Hussein Medical Centre5856856
Luzmila4630195
Khalidi Maternity4644281/6
Akhil Maternity4624412
Jabal Amman Maternity4642362
Malhas, J. Amman4636140
Palestine, Shmeisani5607071

Shmeisani Hospital5607431
Jordan Hospital5607550
University Hospital5353444
Al-Muasher Hospital 5667227/9
Al-Ahli, Abdali5664164/6
Italian, Al-Muasher 4777101/3
Al-Bashir4775111/26
Army, Marka4891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital5157100
Amal Hospital5607155
Al Amal Cancer Centre5353000

ZARQA:
Zarqa Gov. Hospital09983325
Zarqa National Hospital09900560
Ibn Sina Hospital09986731
Al Hikma Modern Hospital09990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)75555
Roman Catholic Hospital (02)72275
Ibn Al Nafes Hospital027101372, (02)7103101
Rosary Sisters Hospital027102831, (02)7103011
Specialty Hospital027103100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)2041111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) Information

department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (44)53200-5, where it should always be verified. Information on other flights can be supplied on phone 44 (53200). Information on Royal Wings flights can be supplied on phone 4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
05:45Jeddah (add) (RJ)
07:15Sanaa (RJ)
08:25Bomab (RJ)
08:50Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:30New Delhi (RJ)
10:05Beirut (RJ)
10:05Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:15Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:35Colombo (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:25London (RJ)
17:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
18:05Kuwait (RJ)
18:05Athens (RJ)
19:05Bangkok, Calcutta (RJ)
20:00Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
22:50Lamaca (RJ)
02:30Jeddah (add) (RJ)
03:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

13:15Riyadh (SV)
14:10Sharjah (AH)
14:45Doha (QR)
15:55Doha (EK)
17:25Muscat, Dubai (GF)
18:40Beirut (ME)
19:05Paris (AF)
20:25Tel Aviv (LY)

20:40Cairo (MS)
23:10Istanbul (TK)
00:25Moscow (SU)
01:15Amsterdam (KL)
04:10London (BA)
08:20Alexandria (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

For Thursday
08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
13:45 Tel Aviv (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
18:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
23:15 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
For Friday
08:50 Aqaba (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
17:30 Gaza (arriving at QAIA) (RW)
18:00 Aqaba (arriving at Marka Airport) (RW)
18:40 Tel Aviv (arriving at QAIA) (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
06:30Beirut (RJ)
11:00Shannon, Chicago (RJ)
11:25Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
11:40Abu Dhabi, Al 'Ain (RJ)
12:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
12:05Kuwait (RJ)
12:10Paris (RJ)
12:15London (RJ)
12:15Athens (RJ)
12:30Amsterdam (RJ)
19:35Lamaca (RJ)

Barak's opponents left red-faced over accusations

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Opponents of Labour Party leader Ehud Barak were called to account Wednesday after Israel's state watchdog cleared him of damning allegations he fled after a fatal army training accident in 1992.

Members of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing Likud Party had used the 1992 incident, in which five elite commandos were killed, to try to blacken Barak's name in the run-up to May elections.

"Barak's name was unfairly sullied and those responsible should apologise," Arieh Deri, leader of the religious Shas Party, told Israel Radio.

Avraham Burg, one of Labour's campaign managers, called on Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi in particular, who caused a storm when he raised the allegations in parliament last year, to publicly apologise.

And the Israeli media suggested Wednesday that the mud-slinging against Barak — who opinion polls say is running neck-and-neck with Netanyahu in the race for prime minister — would backfire on Likud.

Both Barak's and Netanyahu's offices said they would have no official comment until the report is made public.

During the election campaign Barak's opponents have played on the similarity between his family name and the Hebrew word for flee — "Barach".

But state comptroller Eliezer Goldberg on Tuesday issued a long-awaited classified report that cleared the then military chief-of-staff of accusations he left the scene before the evacuation of soldiers who were killed and injured during a top secret exercise.

Five members of the army's most prestigious commando unit, Sayaret Matkal, died and several others wounded when a guided missile was mistakenly fired at them at the Tse'elim base in the southern Negev region.

Reports in the foreign press, never confirmed, said the exercise was part of training for an assassination attempt possibly targeting Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

There were also allegations of a cover-up by the military leadership of some aspects of the accident, which have haunted Barak since he left the army in 1995 and entered politics.

20:30Jeddah (add) (RJ)
21:30Jeddah (RJ)
21:45Cairo (RJ)
22:00Jeddah (add) (RJ)
00:10 Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur (RJ)

Other Flights

05:50Damascus, Frankfurt (LH)
14:45Riyadh (SV)
15:00Annabab, Algiers (AH)
15:35Doha (QR)
17:00Damascus, Dubai (EK)
18:15 Abu Dhabi, Muscat (GF)
20:00Beirut (ME)
20:50Tel Aviv (LY)
21:40Cairo (MS)
01:55Moscow (SU)
02:15Amsterdam (KL)
04:45Alexandria (BA)
06:00Istanbul (TK)
07:25Paris (AF)
09:05London (BA)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights

For Thursday
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
11:30 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
19:45 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
20:15 Tel Aviv (from Marka Airport) (RW)
For Friday
08:30 Aqaba (from Marka Airport) (RW)
13:30 Gaza (from Marka Airport) (RW)
16:15 Tel Aviv (from QAIA) (RW)
20:30 Aqaba (from QAIA) (RW)

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Bakers Union says millers crying wolf over 'poor quality' wheat

By Mohammad Ben Hussein

AMMAN — The Ministry of Trade and Industry on Wednesday brushed aside claims made by two mills that the wheat supplied by the government is below standards.

Minister of Trade, Industry and Supply Mohammad Asfour told the Jordan Times on Wednesday that the wheat furnished by the ministry to mills across the country is normal.

"There is simply nothing wrong with [the wheat]," he said.

Earlier this week, two mills in the capital complained that the grain they received from the government's silos is below standards, which they say causes the flour to appear black.

Reports appeared in Arabic newspapers quoting a miller who called on the government to take back the wheat and stop providing with the low-quality wheat because it would have negative consequences on their business.

He said his mill has refused to pay for the wheat, insisting the government take the shipment back.

"The wheat is harmless,

but at the same time it is useless [because the flour cannot be sold]," said the owner without mentioning his name.

In an interview with the Jordan Times, Abdul Ilah Hamawi, head of the Bakers Union, criticised the millers for creating an uproar "out of the blue in order to press the new government grant them certain demands they thought they lost after the government of Fayez Tarawneh resigned."

"They did not want to start negotiating with the new government from the beginning," he told the Jordan Times without further elaboration.

"Union members complained against flour supplied by two mills only. The other five mills in the country are providing wheat of a very high quality," he told the Jordan Times.

"Many bakeries have sent back shipments they received from the flour mills and others are awaiting to send the rest of the flour," said Hamawi.

Hamawi said, "assuming [the millers'] claims are true, the country used to receive wheat of a much worse quality than what they have described, but they never complained

about it."

Officials from the two companies that have raised the complaint, Jordan Mills Company and Al Haditha Mills Company, declined to comment on the issue.

Hamawi said, "The government's silos contain thousands of tonnes of wheat, which have been distributed without complaint. Why have the last few tonnes suddenly been deemed 'below standard'?" he asked.

Hamawi noted that there have been no complaints about the quality of fine flour — used in cakes and pastries — although fine flour and the commercial flour used in bread are both ground from the same wheat.

Other mills contacted by the Jordan Times reported that they have had no problems with the wheat supplied by the government.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry and Supply has taken samples from the wheat that the millers allege is below par and is currently conducting tests to assess its quality.

"Those people cannot tamper with people's major food supply and should not be left alone," said Hamawi.

Rawabdeh says public schools Internet project still on, reiterates government's commitment to JTC privatisation

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Prime Minister Abdur Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh on Wednesday said the government will proceed with a project to connect public schools to the Internet despite a row over the resignation of Jordan Telecommunications Corporation Board Chairman Ali Shukri.

The prime minister also said his government was fully committed to the privatisation of the JTC.

Rawabdeh, who addressed the Lower House of Parliament yesterday during its ordinary session, denied that the project had been suspended following Shukri's resignation.

"This project is still in the works and we will never accept halting it," the prime minister told the 80-member chamber. "We intend to speed up the implementation of this project."

Rawabdeh's statement came four days after the resignation of Shukri who accused Minister of

Telecommunications Jamal Sarairoh of "interfering" in the work of the JTC.

In his letter, addressed to Prime Minister Rawabdeh, Shukri said Sarairoh had called a JTC official and ordered that a project to connect Jordan's schools to the Internet be stopped immediately.

The project had been initiated last year at the behest of the late King Hussein, who in January sent Shukri a letter praising the JTC's work and directing him to oversee the connection of the Kingdom's 755 public schools to the Internet, and launch a mobile phone service network.

Rawabdeh defended Sarairoh's action, saying that he was merely asking for time to study the project.

Sarairoh also demanded that the JTC transfer JD12 million to the state treasury, according to Shukri.

The premier said that JTC is obligated to pay to the treasury JD120 million annually, in 12 installments.

"What the minister [Sarairoh] demanded is that the JTC should pay JD10 million to the finance ministry monthly. The amount we requested was available to the firm," the premier said.

Rawabdeh said he requested that the Audit Bureau investigate all these matters and the present status of the JTC and submit a report on its activities.

Last year, the JTC transferred JD114 million to the government, JD7 million on a monthly basis and JD30 million in extra revenues, according to a JTC official.

JTC officials said that every month the government and the firm's management meet to discuss the payment [to the treasury] based on its projects and expenditures.

Shukri insisted that the payment was not yet due and was not agreed upon.

"We have not come with a prepared agenda against any government official and we will refer to court anybody who fails to shoulder

his responsibility in a honest manner," the premier said.

During the session, deputies demanded an investigation of the issue. Some lawmakers defended Sarairoh's action while others charged that the minister was simply "settling old accounts."

Deputies Sidqi Shbatar and Saleh Jbour praised the minister's decision and accused Shukri of mismanagement. They also accused Shukri of allegedly "seizing" 145 dunums of state lands in Amman's Humar neighbourhood and of "accumulating his wealth through illegal channels."

"We call upon the government to investigate how Shukri has accumulated his wealth and how he has come to own luxurious homes in different countries," Jbour said.

The two deputies said the Internet project launched by Shukri was "extravagant in nature and will cost the treasury millions of dinars" when basic school needs have yet to be met.

Deputy Abdullah Akaileh accused the minister of acting against Shukri according to what he described as "predetermined agenda."

"The project Shukri was implementing is very essential. The minister should have waited for a while before taking the decision," Akaileh said.

"There appears to be a war of interest between those who support the privatisation of the JTC and those who oppose it. An investigation should be launched to reveal the truth," the lawmaker said.

When the new Cabinet was formed last week, analysts said they expected the outspoken chairman and Sarairoh to clash over how to run the state-owned company, especially on how to privatise the firm.

Sarairoh has championed selling a large stake of the company to a strategic partner, while Shukri favours a public offering of the firm's shares on the Amman Financial Market to Jordanian and foreign investors.

Prince Ali, government discuss Haj services for wayward pilgrims

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Prince Ali Wednesday chaired a meeting at the Ministry of Interior to discuss arrangements for receiving and providing services to pilgrims passing through Jordan en route to Saudi Arabia to perform pilgrimage to Mecca. Prince Ali said officials discussed the best way to serve pilgrims of various nationalities who cross Jordan's borders.

The Prince said a place at the International Automobile Exhibition in Marj

Hamam has been selected which can be used to provide meals and other assistance to pilgrims. Prince Ali said the late King Hussein issued directives to the government to offer special treatment to pilgrims, noting that the government will look into the possibility of offering them tax exemptions.

Prince Ali called on clubs, voluntary societies and people willing to provide food and other forms of assistance to call the Ministry of Awqaf.

NES metes out one-day suspension to students, official says school solicited police protection following e-mail threats of vandalism

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — The New English School, the scene of four days of student discontent over plans to raise tuition fees, suspended several students for one day yesterday.

"The past week has been very difficult for all of us and [we are] trying to deal with [the tuition] matter in the calmest manner possible," High School Deputy Director and Senior School Head Teacher David Kearns told the Jordan Times.

"We have suspended some students for only one day. This is within our regulations," said Kearns.

Kearns refused to elaborate on the reasons behind the suspensions, but conceded that

the suspensions were "indirectly connected" to student strikes over the past few days against the proposed tuition hike.

Kearns however denied reports from teachers and students who told the Jordan Times that some students would be refused acceptance for the next academic year for their participation in the protests.

An intermittent strike, staged mostly by senior students, spontaneously erupted on Saturday after the administration distributed papers informing their parents about a new tuition structure, effective as of the next scholastic year.

Students and teachers have given varying accounts about

the incidents at the school. Some have claimed that plainclothes policemen had taken students into the school building individually for questioning and have alleged that they were intimidated to give up the strike. Others reported that men wandering around school grounds were body guards hired by the school's owner Sa'id Al Turk.

In the school's first public comments on the NES incidents, Kearns said the school solicited the assistance of police in civilian clothes to watch and protect the school premises after the school administration had received e-mail threatening that the school may be vandalised in connection with the increase of tuition fees.

GAM opts for parking meters in capital to discourage 'haphazard' parking

By Susan Resheq

AMMAN — The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) plans to install parking meters along busy streets in the capital in an effort to ease traffic congestion and prevent illegal parking, officials said Wednesday.

GAM officials said the municipality, whose services are extended to just less than half of Jordan's 4.6 million citizens, will invite companies to bid for the installation and operation of the parking meters.

However, the move raised some concern among many of capital's already cash-strapped citizens who will have to pay for what once was free parking space.

The decision to install the parking meters was approved by the GAM council late on

Tuesday. However, GAM officials declined to say when the tender will be floated and when the devices, similar to those operating in big European cities, will be in service.

"We believe such traffic meters will help regulate the unorganised and haphazard parking of vehicles on roadsides and on pavements, especially in congested commercial areas under GAM's umbrella," said one official.

"We hope to prevent double parking in public places and to allow shoppers and visitors of commercial areas to find parking places," he added.

The GAM will select streets where these meters will be installed and will coordinate with government departments to set up necessary enforcement.

"However, the GAM will

not be responsible for any damage that could occur to the parking meters during the investment period," added another municipality official.

Investors who win the bids will have to pay the GAM yearly fees — the amount of which is still undecided — and will set up the meters in cooperation with GAM workers.

The GAM council also decided to donate a two-dunum piece of land in Abdoun to enable the United Arab Emirates (UAE) build a permanent compound housing the embassy and the ambassador's residence.

"The approval was granted in reciprocation of the UAE's grant to Jordan of a similar piece of land for the construction of the Jordanian diplomatic mission in Abu Dhabi and a residence for the ambassador," said the official.

People key to environment protection

By Dana Charkasi

AMMAN — A visiting full-bright scholar stressed the need to involve citizens in efforts to conserve nature preserves and protect biodiversity.

In a lecture entitled "Effective Conservation With Site Planning," Lytton Musselman said human interaction with conservation efforts was a key to ensuring the success of environment protection policies.

Musselman, manager of the Blackwater Ecological Preserve in the American state of Virginia, said human interaction was a key feature in a plan adopted by the reserve there to protect long leaf pines through

controlled fires to enable them to grow.

"This plan was developed to fit any kind of community anywhere in the world," he told the audience of one dozen. "This new approach accounts for the human component in the preserve and people's interest in and use of the site."

Instead of fencing off the preserve without explanation, conservation officials convinced the local population of their interest in protecting the sites.

Musselman believes that once locals know the value of such a project, they will become the site's protectors.

Musselman also underlined

the importance of public awareness campaigns to involve locals in environment protection efforts.

However, Jamal Qassem, a Jordan University professor of agriculture, said Musselman's approach may not be applicable in the Kingdom, where many shepherds rely on animals to survive.

He said such a project requires further investigation to determine whether or not it could be applied here.

"It's not enough to only explain to people why a preserve is important. You have to offer them alternative sites for their animals to graze because animals are their sole source of income," he said.

What's Going On

Films

- German film "Das Leben ist eine Baustelle" (with subtitles in English) at Goethe-Institut, Jabal Amman on Wednesday March 17 at 6:00 p.m.
- "The Mask of Zorro" at Books@Café, Jabal Amman on Sunday March 14 at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 46504778).

Lectures

- "Poetry in the Classroom: Teacher's Requests" by Dr. Nicholas Linfield, at the British Council, Jabal Amman on Monday March 15 at 5:00 p.m.



NGOs visit Hashemite fund

AMMAN (J.T.) — Representatives of diplomatic missions, international agencies and regional organisations visited the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD), on Monday, to pay their condolences to Her Royal Highness Princess Basma.

During their visit, Her Royal Highness expressed her gratitude and recognition of the supportive role that these organisations have played over the years, in the field of development, and for the solidarity they showed Jordan throughout such a painful time in its history.

Her Royal Highness said that the JOHUD is embarking on a new phase in its growth, bearing a new title, which reflects a commitment to the humanitarian vision of His Majesty King Hussein, and a tribute to the Hashemite legacy. "The new title best signifies the role of the organisation as a human development fund that focuses not only on social development, but surpasses to a wider concept that covers all aspects of human development," said Executive Director of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Jorgen Lissner, who attended the meeting.

During their visit, the heads and representatives of the various organisations expressed their own continued commitment to the national development process, in a spirit of partnership with Jordanian counter-

parts. Referring to the fund's title, and the new chapter it represents, Her Royal Highness underlined the importance of such cooperation, in consolidating the work of the past, and facing the challenges that lie ahead. Her Royal Highness also reaffirmed the Fund's commitment to the human element of the development process, which she noted is not only in keeping with the humanitarian mission of His Late Majesty, but mutually reinforces international development criteria.

As a national NGO, which was established in 1978 by Princess Basma, the fund continues to play a pivotal role in the development arena throughout the country. Recently, the fund has undertaken to increase its efficiency and performance in the field, through a process of restructuring and planning that insures effective responses to the needs and challenges faced by Jordanian society. This process was commended by the visiting representatives. "Her Royal Highness has been working together with the board of the fund to expand its involvement in socio-economic development, concerning issues such as employment, income generation, empowerment of local communities, and the empowerment of women," said Lissner.

Also on Tuesday Princess Basma met representatives of the women organisations, charitable organisations, pri-

ivate schools, clubs, youth and cultural centres, cooperative societies and groups concerned with the development process in Jordan.

Addressing the visitors, Princess Basma underlined the need for the continuation of the social development process with additional efforts to attain the aspirations of the late King Hussein, who, she said, had constantly worked to help Jordan achieve progress and development.

"Our efforts will continue in the service of our country and our communities and the work will be in extension of King Hussein's endeavours which were felt by all public sectors and all communities," added Princess Basma.

Expressing pride in what the Jordanian women's organisations had achieved under the late King, the Princess voiced hope that further accomplishments will be achieved in the future noting that Jordan will continue to render due support for women under His Majesty King Abdullah as it did under the late King Hussein.

"We have to join ranks and consolidate and mobilise our efforts to prove to the world that we are able to carry King Hussein's message and achieve his noble goals of developing our country," the Princess stressed.

Holbrooke, Milosevic clash over Kosovo

BELGRADE (R) — U.S. Balkans envoy Richard Holbrooke locked horns with Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic Wednesday in talks designed to avert a collision with the west over Kosovo.

As Holbrooke and chief international peace talks mediator Chris Hill began a tough meeting with Milosevic, fresh clashes erupted in the troubled Serbian province, where thousands of ethnic Albanian villagers have fled the latest violence.

Reporters found Serb forces had devastated a village in the south, leaving most of the houses in smouldering ruins, after they moved in to destroy a local rebel headquarters Tuesday.

Diplomats could not give any indication of the length of Holbrooke's talks with Milosevic, which follow 17 days of inconclusive internationally-brokered negotiations in France last month.

"It's minute by minute," said one.

"We know that Milosevic is a master of brinkmanship and we do not expect an early answer," said EU Kosovo envoy Wolfgang Petritsch, who met Holbrooke early in the morning.

Holbrooke will try to persuade Milosevic to agree to an autonomy plan to end the year-old conflict in Kosovo between the security forces and separatist ethnic Albanian guerrillas.

Aware of the shortcomings of a ceasefire deal he

negotiated with Milosevic in October, Holbrooke's main efforts will focus on trying to convince him to drop seemingly implacable objections to letting 28,000 NATO troops police the plan.

The rebels were said Wednesday to be "within hours" of signing up to the settlement. But mediators remained cautious after facing objections from the rebels to requirements to disarm and the lack of a referendum on independence.

NATO has warned Milosevic that it is prepared to bomb Yugoslav military targets if he is seen to be blocking a deal.

"The threat of greater war is ever present," Holbrooke said Tuesday, turning up the heat for a possible showdown.

"We are only a few days away from a tragedy of even greater dimensions than what has occurred already."

Diplomats say the next round of talks in Paris, due to begin Monday, could last three or four days, after which the air strike threat would take on greater urgency.

But only if Milosevic presents a clear-cut obstacle to peace, which means the guerrillas must have signed up by then.

Petritsch said he had spoken to Hasim Thaqi, head of the Kosovo Liberation Army's political directorate, over the past two days and that the guerrillas were very close to signing.

"His basic indication was that they are going to sign."

that it is a matter of hours... it is 95 per cent a done deal. They just have to make sure the last local commander is on board."

Hill was more cautious. Asked about a local media report from Kosovo that commanders may meet Wednesday, he said: "If that's true that's very good news."

The mission by Holbrooke, Washington's diplomatic weapon of last resort and one of the few Western officials Milosevic is prepared to negotiate with, underlined the dominant U.S. role in the international peace efforts.

But he met ambassadors of the six-nation Contact Group earlier Wednesday to assuage fears expressed by some Western diplomats that he would cut a deal without consulting them.

"We're coordinating now with the Europeans in the Contact Group," Holbrooke told reporters on his way into the meeting with ambassadors from Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. "We're on a single position."

Holbrooke said he would also be coordinating his position with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who is due to meet Milosevic Thursday.

Moscow opposes any threat of NATO air strikes against its fellow-Orthodox Slavs in Belgrade but has said it is prepared to contribute to a ground force, which is already assembling in Macedonia, if Milosevic invites it in.



File picture dated Feb. 3, 1999, shows Austrian bomb maker Franz Fuchs held responsible for the explosion of three pipe bombs and the planning or handling of 25 letter bomb attacks between 1993 and 1996, in which four people were killed and 15 others injured, among them former Vienna Mayor Helmut Zilk who lost one hand in an attack. Fuchs was sentenced by the district court in Graz to life-long imprisonment for multiple murder of "racist and xenophobic reasons." The court also ordered his admission to an institution for mentally abnormal criminals (AFP photo)

Austrian racist bomber sentenced to life in prison

VIENNA (R) — An Austrian man was sentenced to life imprisonment Wednesday for a racist bombing campaign that killed four people and maimed several more.

A court in the southern city of Graz found Franz Fuchs, 49, guilty on all counts, including four murders and more than a dozen cases of causing grievous bodily harm with bombs. Most of which were concealed in letters.

The court deliberated for several hours before handing down the verdict at 2.30 a.m. (0130 GMT) in the absence of the defendant. He belatedly racist slogans every time he appeared in the dock and had therefore been excluded from the courtroom for most of the month-long trial.

"Long live the Germanic people," he shouted in the dock Tuesday during a final attempt by the judge to

have him present for the proceedings.

An unemployed technician whose letter bomb campaign terrorised Austria for four years, Fuchs was described by court psychiatrists as intelligent but a fanatic bent on violence.

Fuchs, whose hands were blown off by a home-made bomb during his arrest in 1997, will serve his sentence in a prison for the mentally disturbed. It was not immediately known whether he planned to appeal.

Fuchs claims to be a member of the obscure Bajuvarian Liberation Army, which he says wants to reunite German-speaking peoples in Bavaria, the Alps and along the River Danube within borders that existed between the sixth and 12th centuries.

But the court ruled that he acted alone and prosecutors said the group existed only

in his mind.

Fuchs was arrested in his hometown of Gralla, 240 km southwest of Vienna, when police were alerted by two women who telephoned to say they thought they were being stalked.

A search of his house turned up five pipe bombs and a booby-trapped device similar to one that killed four gypsies in 1995 in the worst of his bomb attacks on foreigners, minority groups and those who support the integration of foreigners in Austria.

His most prominent victim, former Vienna Mayor Helmut Zilk, told the court last month how a letter-bomb went off in his hands at home one December evening in 1993.

Zilk, apparently targeted for his support of foreigners' causes during his years as mayor, lost two fingers of his left hand.

Spanish police deal another blow to Basque ETA

MADRID (AFP) — Spanish police, pressing a crackdown on the Basque separatist group ETA, dismantled an ETA unit and arrested nine suspected guerrillas after taking the ETA military leader in Paris, the interior ministry said Wednesday.

The latest arrests, in and around the northern city of San Sebastian late Tuesday, included two of the ETA's most wanted members, Sergio Polo Escobes and Kepa Etxeberria Sagarzazu.

The ministry said the two were taken at the start of the night-long sweep after an exchange of gunfire with police in which no one was injured.

The two are suspected members of the ETA's Donosti unit, considered to be one of the most ruthless and best organised groups in the rebel organisation.

Police blame the Donosti unit for the July 1997 abduction and murder of Miguel Angel Blanco, a popular young city councillor in the Basque city of Ermua, whose death unleashed a wave of anti-ETA revulsion across Spain.

Polo Escobes, an ETA member since 1983, is a suspect in five murders and numerous bomb attacks that injured many. Etxeberria Sagarzazu is wanted in the 1997 murder of a prison guard in San Sebastian.

Earlier Tuesday, ETA's suspected military leader, Javier Arizuren Ruiz, one of Spain's most wanted men, was arrested in Paris along with five other suspected ETA members.

Ruiz, also known as Kantauri, was arrested along with five other suspected ETA members in two separate operations.

Four, including Arizuren Ruiz, were arrested at an hotel. The others were seized at an apartment used by the group as a logistics base.

The interior ministry said the Donosti unit had been under police surveillance for a long time, but that the Tuesday operation was accelerated with the participation of the French police.

The Basque region, which is mainly in Spain but straddles the border with southwestern France, is home to more than 1.25 million people of Basque ethnicity, at whose core is a unique and ancient language.

ETA, whose initials stand for equivalent of Basque Homeland and Liberty, waged a 30-year violent separatist campaign in which nearly 1,000 people died.

It pledged late last month to uphold an open-ended ceasefire it declared last Sept. 18, but the Spanish government, insisting ETA is still a terrorist group, said the pledge contained "nothing new."

A government spokesman said the ETA statement was "aimed at pleasing its grassroots, for internal consumption, and contains nothing new in terms of the situation."

"The ETA continues to be what it is: a terrorist group that accepts neither democracy nor the will of the citizens," he told Spanish national radio RNE.

In its statement, the ETA praised the "increasingly courageous" attitude of the Basque moderate nationalist parties and the French Basque party Abertzaleen Batasuna (AB).

NEWS IN BRIEF

Namibian president starts state visit to Botswana

GABORONE (AFP) — President Sam Nujoma flew into Gaborone Wednesday at the start of a two-day state visit to discuss bilateral issues with his neighbouring leader, President Festus Mogae. Nujoma was met by Mogae and a 21-gun salute, before the presidents retired to the state house ahead of private talks Wednesday afternoon. High on their agenda is Botswana's granting of political asylum last month to 15 men seeking the secession of Namibia's northeastern Caprivi strip. Windhoek wants the men, among 2,500 Namibians who fled to Botswana last year, to be extradited. Nujoma has branded the refugees "terrorists" and called for them to stand trial for treason in Namibia. The southern African countries have also been at loggerheads over the ownership of two tiny islands in the Chobe and Linyati rivers which form Botswana's northern border with Namibia. The International Court of Justice in The Hague is currently deliberating on the case of one of the islands, Sedudu, in the Chobe River and both governments have agreed to respect the court's decision. Thursday, Nujoma is scheduled to tour arid Botswana, visiting the Selebi-Phikwe copper-nickel mine in the north and the country's biggest dam, Letsibogo. The presidents are due to address a media conference Friday, before Nujoma returns to Windhoek.

Beijing accuses Dalai Lama of gruesome human rights abuses

BEIJING (AFP) — China's propaganda machine moved into top gear Wednesday on the 40th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising, accusing the Dalai Lama of an orgy of rights abuses from human sacrifices to slavery and torture. In a report quoting the head of the historical archives of Tibet, Suonam Gelik, the official Xinhua news agency listed alleged abuses by the Tibetan spiritual leader before he fled his homeland for exile in 1959. "Human skulls, fresh human blood and complete human skins as well as internal organs" were ordered by the Dalai Lama to celebrate his birthday until the end of the 1940s, Xinhua alleged. Historical records told of human sacrifices in religious services which Xinhua maintained was a common practice in "feudal" Tibet. Chinese troops marched into Tibet in 1950 "to liberate" the Tibetans from the feudal system headed by the 14th Dalai Lama — the god-king. Nine years later Tibetans rose up against Chinese rule, but the revolt was crushed and the Dalai Lama and his entourage fled across the Himalayan mountains into northern India. But before Chinese rule was established over Tibet, slave markets had multiplied when one man was exchanged for 15 sheep, Xinhua said. And the "feudal" authorities demanded particularly bloody punishments, such as the tearing out of eyes and tongues, severing arms and legs or throwing people off cliffs to "protect the feudal serf system. Often these cruel landlords would strip the skins off slaves and turn them into utensils or decorative articles," Xinhua added.

Jakarta should scrap foreign journalist black list

JAKARTA (AFP) — The Indonesian government should scrap a Suharto-era decree which resulted in scores of foreign journalists being blacklisted and barred from entering the country, Information Minister Yunus Yosfiah said Wednesday. "It should be withdrawn" to strengthen press freedoms in the country, Yosfiah was quoted as telling journalists. Yosfiah said the post-Suharto government supports the development of press freedom and providing greater room for the foreign press, so long as their reports are accurate. "It (the ministerial decree) should be reviewed. In the past, it could be justified. But it is now against the present situation," the minister said, adding he would soon discuss the move with the justice and foreign affairs ministries. "Not only journalists. The government is even willing to free political prisoners," he said, adding he will coordinate with related agencies to facilitate foreign journalists' coverage of the June 7 elections, the first since the fall of Suharto. In the Suharto years scores of foreign journalists were black-listed, with the most recent bans slapped on a German and a Dutch national during the March 1988 election of Suharto to a seventh-five year term by the rubber stamp People's Consultative Assembly.

Italian police issue 41 arrest warrants in anti-Mafia operation

REGGIO CALABRIA, Italy (AFP) — Police in southern Italy Wednesday launched a dragnet for 41 suspected mafiosi linked with 18 murders as part of a crackdown on organised crime, police said. The public prosecutor in Reggio Calabria, in the toe of Italy, issued the arrest warrants against suspected members of the local N'Drangheta clan for murder, links with the Mafia, and arms and drug trafficking. One of the murders in question was that of 10-year-old Marcella Tassone, shot dead in 1989 after she recognised the man who murdered her brother Alfonso, himself a suspected mafia member. The girl had been walking with her brother when he was murdered. She then made the mistake of calling the killer by his name, prompting him to turn back and shoot her in the head.

Ukraine to discuss Chernobyl's future

KIEV (R) — Ukraine's government will meet Thursday to discuss the possible closure of the former Soviet state's troubled Chernobyl nuclear power plant, a government statement said Wednesday. It gave no details. Ukraine promised the group of seven leading industrial nations to shut down Chernobyl by 2000 in exchange for aid to finish building two replacement reactors in western Ukraine, but it says the promised funds have yet to appear. The plant now operates only one reactor. It originally had four. One exploded in 1986, sending a cloud of radioactive dust billowing over Europe in the world's worst civil nuclear disaster. The second reactor was stopped in 1997 after it exhausted its lifetime resources. The third has still not been rehabilitated after a fire in 1991. Ukraine Tuesday shrugged off demands by the European Commission that it close the nuclear plant as soon as possible, saying it was the safest of its kind in the former Soviet Union.

Indian security forces kill 7 rebels

GAUHATI, India (AP) — Indian security forces raided a jungle hide-out of tribal separatists in India's remote northeast and killed seven rebels, police said Wednesday. A fierce gun battle that began just before midnight continued into Wednesday in the dense forest area in north Tripura district, 150 kilometres from Agartala, the capital of Tripura state, said B.P. Singh, the state police chief. "There has been no casualty on the security forces side, although both sides have resorted to heavy firing," Singh said. Police said the identity of those killed was not known, but they were suspected to be members of the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura, an outfit fighting for an independent tribal homeland outside India for the past 15 years. Paramilitary troops recovered five Chinese assault rifles from the militants. The injured rebels were carried away by their colleagues deep inside the jungles, Singh said. India's northeastern states are the scene of dozens of insurgencies, mostly over local issues. Tribal insurgency in Tripura state, bordering Bangladesh, has claimed nearly 12,000 lives during the past 25 years.

French press scathing about blood trial verdict

PARIS (R) — French newspapers Wednesday were heavily critical of the acquittal of former Prime Minister Laurent Fabius and one of his ex-ministers in a 1980s AIDS-related blood scandal.

A special court Tuesday did convict one former cabinet minister of manslaughter but, in a near-unprecedented move, waived any sentence against him.

"After the class struggle, now the caste struggle," complained the daily France-Soir, reflecting a popularly held view that France's politicians were a class above the law.

The court of justice of the republic Tuesday found Fabius, currently speaker of the national assembly, and former Social Affairs Minister Georgina Dufloix, innocent in the case in which at least 3,600 people were estimated to have been

infected with AIDS-infected blood and other blood products. At least 1,000 have died.

Former Health Secretary Edmond Herve was convicted but the court handed down no punishment after deciding he had suffered enough during the five-year inquiry leading up to the trial.

France-Soir wrote that "in a special jurisdiction, it is always the most powerful who emerge victorious. There should be the same court for all."

The conservative newspaper Le Figaro said the verdict had opened another trial — that of unacceptable privileges.

"France would be better inspired to copy its neighbours where justice is the same for all. Neither Britain, nor Italy, nor Germany have such procedures for their politicians."

13-year-old British opera star makes U.S. debut

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Charlotte Church has sold two million albums in the United Kingdom, performed for Prince Charles and the Pope and is being touted as an opera phenomenon.

Not bad for a 13-year-old who didn't start performing professionally until two years ago.

"I never dreamed this in my wildest dreams," she said, her long brown hair falling over her shoulders. Charlotte, who has taken the opera world by storm, made her U.S. debut Tuesday at the National Association of Recording Merchandisers annual convention. Her angelic voice, strong and pure, captivated 3,000 audience members and earned her a standing ovation.

Her album, "Voice of an angel," went double platinum in the United Kingdom after just four weeks last year. She's in the Guinness Book of World Records as the youngest artist ever to hit No. 1 on the U.K. charts.

The British sensation did-

n't give much thought to singing until a talent show when she was 11. Charlotte was supposed to introduce her aunt, a professional singer, but stole the show when she began to sing.

Talent agent Jonathan Shalit heard about the young prodigy and wanted to get Charlotte a record deal.

"No one's going to spend \$10 million on an 11-year-old opera singer," Shalit said he thought at the time. "Everyone in the industry told me I was nuts." But Shalit knew a sure thing when he heard it. Charlotte was a natural.

Finally, three record companies agreed to meet with Shalit and his client. Sony Music signed her last year to a five-album deal.

Since then, it's been "complete saturation," Shalit said, with her record climbing up the British charts, constant interviews and even a television series planned for the young star.

For all the media attention and fuss over her voice,

Charlotte really is just a teenager. She likes to play computer games, have her friends sleep over and loves "The Simpsons."

"Sometimes travelling gets a bit boring," the eighth-grader said, fingering her collection of necklaces.

She has had to get used to being away from her home in Wales and having a stylist pick out her clothes and fix her hair. "I don't have time to shop, which is a shame because I love to shop," she said.

After moving the crowd with Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Pie Jesu," it only took a few minutes for Charlotte to shed her red suit jacket backstage and kick off her shoes.

She giggled as a Sony executive gave her a piggy-back ride.

When Shalit suggested Charlotte put her jacket back on, she trudged off into her dressing room.

"Awwwwww! It doesn't really matter," she said, looking for her jacket.



Over 5,000 Tibetan refugees and monks stage a rally on the outskirts of Kathmandu, demanding a free Tibet. The head of the Tibetan government in exile, Sonam Topgyal, said Wednesday that Tibet would achieve its freedom within the lifetime of the current Dalai Lama, while Tibetan exiles in several countries celebrated the 40th anniversary of the failed 1959 Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule (AFP photo)

Tibetans in Nepal seek quick solution

KATHMANDU (R)—Tibetan refugees Wednesday held rallies in Nepal to mark the 40th anniversary of an abortive uprising in their homeland against Chinese rule, and demanded a quick resolution of the issue.

"Tibet is an important issue which needs a quick solution and revolution," read a giant banner displayed at a prayer meeting at the site of a 15th century stupa, or temple tower.

The meeting was attended by about 5,000 Tibetan refugees.

Some Tibetans chanted "Free Tibet" slogans after the prayer meeting. Riot police stopped them from leaving the stupa at Boudhanath in the Nepali capital, Kathmandu.

"Tibet belongs to the Tibetans. China should

leave it," said a 48-year-old refugee, Tsewang Lama.

The Dalai Lama, Tibet's god-king, fled to northern India with thousands of supporters after the unsuccessful uprising against Chinese rule in 1959. Thousands of others have fled over the years, and about 16,000 Tibetan refugees now live in Nepal.

A message from the Dalai Lama was read out at the meeting.

A report from Pokhara, 200 km west of Kathmandu, said police used batons to disperse a procession of Tibetans shouting anti-China slogans.

Refugee officials said about 10 people were injured and some 50 detained in Pokhara, but police said only five were detained.

"They (the Tibetans) went out of control and tried to misbehave with police. So they were dispersed," said additional inspector general of police Ram Kaji Bantawa.

Nepal, which considers Tibet an "integral" part of its giant northern neighbour China, does not allow any political activities by the Tibetans.

"They (the refugees) are not allowed to organise any anti-China activities and have to follow the Nepali policy," a home (interior) ministry spokesman said.

A report from Kodari, 114 km northeast of Kathmandu on the Nepal-China border, said Beijing had beefed up security along the border to stop the flow of refugees.

"Gun-toting Chinese guards have been posted on

their side of the border," local resident Dawa Sherpa said by phone from Kodari, which a highway links with the Tibetan capital of Lhasa.

Refugee officials in Kathmandu could not give details of increased security along the border, but said there were more security personnel.

Government and refugee officials say 2,000-2,500 Tibetans flee annually across the Himalayas to Nepal en route to Dharamasala in India, where the Dalai Lama lives in exile.

While Nepal gave asylum to early refugees, it does not allow new arrivals. There are no designated entry points along the 1,000-km border for Tibetans who travel mountain trails and passes to Nepal.

British, French ministers in historic west Africa policy

ACCRA (AFP) — The foreign ministers of Britain and France were due in Ghana late Wednesday on a historic joint policy mission to west African countries which were the object of colonial rivalries.

Robin Cook and Hubert Vedrine were awaited in the former British colony before heading together to Côte d'Ivoire Thursday on a trip, which gives both symbolic and practical meaning to a declaration signed in Saint Malo, in northwestern France last December at the end of a Franco-British summit.

The declaration, signed by French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, seeks to harmonise policies towards Africa. The countries also agreed to develop a shared network of diplomatic missions, and exchange views and information on a regular basis in areas where one of the partners may not be present.

The ministers chose the neighbouring Anglophone and Francophone countries for their first joint mission. The countries, whose borders

were artificially drawn by former colonisers, share common ethnicity and culture.

Cook, on the heels of a trip to Nigeria where he has met that country's President-elect Olusegun Obasanjo, and Vedrine are expected to dine together Wednesday evening with their Ghanaian counterpart, Victor Gbeho. Thursday, they will hold talks with President Jerry Rawlings, before heading to Abidjan where they will meet Ivorian President Henri Konan Bedie and Foreign Minister Amara Essy.

There they will hold a summit with French, British ambassadors and top-level diplomats from a dozen or so African countries.

Diplomatic sources in the Ghanaian capital noted that France and Britain's multilateral approach comes at a time when Franco-German relations appear to have cooled somewhat.

In any case, as one diplomat put it: "Africa can only benefit from the new cooperation."

The two ministers from centre-left governments have already worked together in

co-chairing the conference in Rambouillet, outside Paris, where world leaders are trying to restore peace in the troubled Yugoslav province of Kosovo.

The ministers will likely have common goals for promoting human rights, good governance, and the rule of law, the diplomat said.

The new spirit of cooperation in French policy towards Africa, while it intends to maintain privileged ties with its former colonies, has expressed a desire to develop closer relations with Anglophone and Lusophone countries.

At the same time, countries such as Ghana, whose first trade partner is Britain, are seeking greater financial assistance from Paris, and closer economic cooperation with its regional Francophone neighbours.

President Rawlings is likely to pay a visit to Paris shortly. Debt and regional instability are likely to be two key issues on the discussion table in Accra and Abidjan.

A rebellion in Sierra Leone, where Ghana has troops deployed in support of the government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, is expected to be high on the agenda.

A surprise rebel invasion of the Sierra Leonean capital on Jan. 6 triggered more than two weeks of fighting and left more than 5,000 dead and several hundreds mutilated.

Britain has offered financial and logistical assistance, mainly to the Nigerian-led west African intervention force fighting rebels.

While France has maintained its distance from the conflict, its allies Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso have nonetheless criticised Freetown's insistence of a military solution to ending the war.

Burkina Faso is accused, along with Liberia, of supporting the rebel side.

Observers say war-ravaged Sierra Leone could prove to be the first test of efforts by London and Paris to harmonise their African policies.

2 dead in fresh riots in Indonesia's Ambon

JAKARTA (R)—Two people died and scores were injured when Indonesian troops fired on tens of thousands of Christians and Muslims fighting with Molotov cocktails, machetes and spears Wednesday in Ambon city, witnesses said.

Sources at two local hospitals told Reuters at least 50 people were admitted with gunshot wounds. One of those who died was shot in the head, one of the sources said.

Earlier, a military official said troops and police would fire on the crowd if necessary.

"We have fired warning shots — if necessary, we will shoot into the crowd," he said. He denied troops had yet fired

into the crowd, but said live rounds were used in warning shots.

But a local resident told Reuters he saw troops and police intermittently firing into the crowd and into the air.

An Ambon resident trapped in his office said the city was like a war zone as the rioting continued late on Wednesday.

"Literally speaking, there's a war going on now," he told Reuters. I am trapped now."

With the armed forces (ABRI) unable to quell waves of violence sweeping Indonesia, ABRI commander General Wiranto has ordered his troops, including police, to shoot rioters on sight.

Roesmanhadi has threatened to sack his provincial commanders if they ignore Wiranto's order.

More than 200 people have died on the small spice island of Ambon, 2,300 km east of Jakarta, in the past two months in communal fighting largely between Ambonese Christians and Muslims from elsewhere in the vast archipelago.

A local journalist said several houses were ablaze.

"I can see smoke from where I live." Thousands of troops have been rushed to the area to help quell the unrest, the military official said.

In a separate incident before dawn Wednesday, one man was stabbed to death and sev-

eral houses were torched.

There were reports of clashes between Christians and Muslims at around midnight Tuesday in two villages which resulted in 10 houses being torched and two home-made bombs set off.

The latest violence follows peace talks Tuesday between Christian and Muslim religious leaders in a bid to end two months violence, the worst religious clashes in decades.

The violence in Ambon has added to the mounting unrest that has swept through Indonesia in the past year as it struggles with its worst economic and political crisis in three decades.

China signals it will not quickly ratify human rights treaties

BEIJING (AFP) — China indicated Wednesday it would not quickly ratify the two international human rights covenants which it has signed.

"I remember that last year China had just signed the U.N. Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," said Qiao Xiaoyang, deputy chairman of the legislative committee of the National People's Congress (NPC).

"But I did not say that ratification will be a very quick process," he told a news conference.

China signed the U.N. Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in October 1997 and last year it signed the sister

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Qiao said the NPC "feels that there are many specific questions which needs further study and research."

The government submitted the first covenant to parliament in June last year for ratification but the second treaty has yet to be handed in, Qiao said. He said China had not taken part in the drafting of the covenants and "therefore some specific issues regarding the implementation and enforcement of those international covenants in China needs our study."

Four U.N. human rights experts arrived Monday for a visit lasting until March 22 to discuss Beijing's

application of the covenants, the United Nations office here said.

They will visit the troubled northwestern region of Xinjiang and the eastern boom city of Shanghai as well as Beijing, the Geneva-based U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said.

The experts will review the technical assistance needed in promoting and protecting human rights as well as how national legislation can be made compatible with the two treaties.

"We believe that before acceding to an international treaty, we have to make further study into that international covenant," Qiao said. "This reflects a responsible

attitude and this also is the normal practice of the international community."

Beijing Sunday warned against a fresh attempt to censure China at the upcoming meeting of the U.N. Rights Commission in Geneva.

"On the question of human rights, if somebody attempts to table an anti-China draft resolution again this year in Geneva, then I think the outcome would not be different from the previous seven times," Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said.

The U.S. Senate passed a non-binding resolution last month urging its delegation to the meeting to push for a resolution of condemnation.

Myanmar ethnic rebels meet over strategy, make political demands

BANGKOK (AP) — Four ethnic rebel groups from Myanmar vowed Wednesday to pick up the pace of their resistance war against the country's military government if it did not meet their political demands.

The joint statement of the Arakan Liberation Army, the Karenni National Progressive Party, the Karen National Union and the Shan State Army came after a meeting of high-ranking leaders of all four groups Tuesday in what was described as "the liberated area."

Although their statement focused on political demands, a source familiar with the meeting said its main aim was to coordinate future guerrilla activities of the groups.

Myanmar's military government signed ceasefires with 17 ethnic rebel groups over the past 10 years, and secured dominant military positions against the few holdouts.

But several minority groups have grown increasingly restive recently, even as the government maintains its strong military advantage.

Many of the ceasefires were uneasy agreements at best, skirting over rather than solving long-standing disagreements about the autonomy sought by the ethnic minorities.

There has also been disappointment that development projects in the minority areas promised by the government have failed to take off, largely because the government doesn't have the money to fund them.

Wednesday's joint statement included demands for the abolition of the ruling

ing junta, which it accused of "repressing and slaughtering the ethnic nationalities and the people for many years."

It also called on the regime to immediately cease making war on and repressing the minorities and to open a tripartite dialogue of the junta, the ethnic minorities and Myanmar's pro-democracy opposition forces.

It called as well for foreign countries to stop investing in Myanmar — also known as Burma — and not to give any aid to its military regime.

The statement, sent to the Associated Press in Bangkok by fax, did not say why the four groups chose to meet at this particular time. None of the demands in the statement were new.

A representative of the Shan group, however, con-

tacted by telephone, said the main, unstated agenda of the meeting was to discuss coordination of military operations against the government.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said one aspect which had been discussed was the timing of guerrilla operations, which could be done concurrently so as keep the Myanmar army from concentrating its forces against any single opponent.

The Shan State Army, whose southern region command took part in the talks, is believed to have about 5,000 men under arms.

The Karenni field a force of about 2,000 men, and the Karen National Union 2,000-3,000, while the Arakan Liberation Party is thought to have about 1,500 guerrillas.



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Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585

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Landmark visit

IRANIAN PRESIDENT Mohammad Khatami's visit to Italy has been rightly hailed as a breakthrough in Iranian relations with the West. President Khatami's talks with the Italian president and prime minister as well as Pope John Paul II could serve as a prelude to greater and more extensive dialogue between Tehran and other Western capitals. Washington has responded favourably, but cautiously, to Iranian overtures in the wake of the election of the moderate Khatami, and Europe has been engaged in a positive, though low-key dialogue with Iran. Europe is, therefore, going full speed towards restoring normal ties with Iran while the U.S. maintains its guarded stance.

The Iranian president arrived in Rome with solid credentials, not only as a moderate who advocates East-West dialogue but also as the duly-elected leader in a free and democratic contest. His standing and position were boosted last week by his supporters' showings in municipal elections. It goes without saying, therefore, that Europe's warm welcome of President Khatami will further strengthen moderation within Iran. This is particularly significant since the contest between conservatives and moderates in Iran is far from over. The Iranian president and his movement for renaissance and enlightenment deserve recognition and support from the international community at large, beginning with Western Europe so that Iran may move closer to international consensus on several fronts.

Iran, the West realises, is a very crucial state for regional security and stability. Ostracising it for much longer would only lend support to radicalism and insecurity in the area. Iran has dropped its absolute opposition to the peace process in the Middle East, something that augurs well for the quest for a comprehensive and just peace between Israel and all its Arab neighbours. While it could be true that Iran could be developing nuclear weapons and the means for their delivery, this probability should not in itself cause others to panic. In the wake of the proliferation of mass destruction weapons in the Middle East and in the Indian subcontinent, it would be difficult to deny Iran what Israel, India, and Pakistan have acquired.

The sooner that Iran is accepted as a legitimate partner for peace and security in the region the better it would be for all sides. No wonder Khatami's visit to Italy is being viewed as ushering in a new epoch in Iranian-Western relations.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra'i's Fahed Faneh commented on Prime Minister Abdul-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh's first statement that he will not only talk but within two weeks will show results, asking will Rawabdeh be able to stop talking and what can he do in two weeks? Two weeks is a very short period to achieve results, unless the premier has already studied plans that are ready for implementation, said Faneh, who added that the government should have exploited the traditional period of 100 days with the press and 30 with the opposition until it proves itself. The writer noted that what could take place in two weeks is a change of personnel and leadership rather than new policies and their implementation. Within two weeks, the prime minister could "bury" the two-day weekend issue, secure thousands of jobs to Jordanians in the Gulf states, reopen Gulf markets to Jordanian produce, declare a nationally-internationally accepted economic programme and most importantly act decisively and take early decisions on the water crisis that will face the country this summer, said Faneh.

Al Arab Al Yawm's Salameh Ne'matt said the great Arab solidarity with Jordan, especially from the Gulf states during recent weeks, is a "certificate of appreciation" of the Kingdom and its regional and international role. It also is a valuable chance to review and reconsider the country's strategies in the coming time in order to serve higher interests, added Ne'matt. Arab solidarity should not be constrained to economic support; Jordan should exploit this politically. If U.S. assistance aims at strengthening Jordan's role in the Middle East peace process, the Gulf's support aims at strengthening the Kingdom's role in other regional issues, Ne'matt said. It is important to make it clear to policy-makers that Jordan will not be able to satisfy all the regional and international powers, as there is no country in the world which enjoys strategic cooperation with all other countries, said the writer. For example, the Kingdom cannot support the UAE and at the same time remain silent over Iranian occupation of a UAE island, and similarly Jordan cannot declare its support to the Iraqi people and at the same time remain silent over human rights violations there, Ne'matt said.

What a nightmare!

View from Academia



Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

I drove and turned on the radio. The programme presenter was charming; his voice was friendly and not in any way obnoxious; and his jokes and comments were profound.

The news was cheerful. All red tape was cancelled; investors were having fun getting their projects approved. Thousands of them were standing in line to invest. All employees were getting salary increases. Custom taxes were cancelled. The cars were very cheap; I could easily change my car. The economy was doing well.

IT WAS a beautiful morning. I got out of the house and found everything in my car just as I had left it the night before. The doors were securely locked, the glove compartment was not tampered with, my speakers were in their place, and none of my personal things were missing. I felt neither upset nor afraid.

It was 7:30 a.m. The car started on the first attempt. As I opened the car window, I inhaled fresh air with no smell of gas or smoke whatsoever. The street was not packed with cars racing each other. The motorists were courteous and cheerful. They kept to their lanes, came to a complete halt at stop signs, and they signalled whenever they turned left or right; they did not blow the horn, scream in your face or attempt to prevent you from taking a left turn.

The pedestrians were as polite, courteous and law-abiding as the motorists. None of them swerved abruptly off the sidewalk, jumped right in the middle of the street in front of you and risked being hit.

Noone threw tissues on the street or spat on the sidewalk. The taxi drivers and school buses were

very considerate. The truck drivers were so nice.

Traffic policemen were all over, regulating traffic, smiling to motorists and pedestrians, and stopping violators. They were all vigilant and mentally alert.

I got to work and found a parking spot. As I walked to my office none of the students bumped or backed into me. Each was careful to leave enough space between himself and everybody else. It was an easy three-minute walk.

My colleagues were all cheerful and smiling; no one frowned or made it a point to give you a nasty glance. In the classroom, the students came fully prepared; they responded to each question even before I had finished.

They expressed themselves eloquently and enthusiastically; everybody was eager to take part in the discussion. Their questions were very intelligent and their answers were very sharp.

Suddenly I was at the post office. I asked the employee for the package that a friend of mine had sent me. The employee gave it to me in a fraction of a second - no delay whatsoever, and no hassle over IDs and signatures. At the

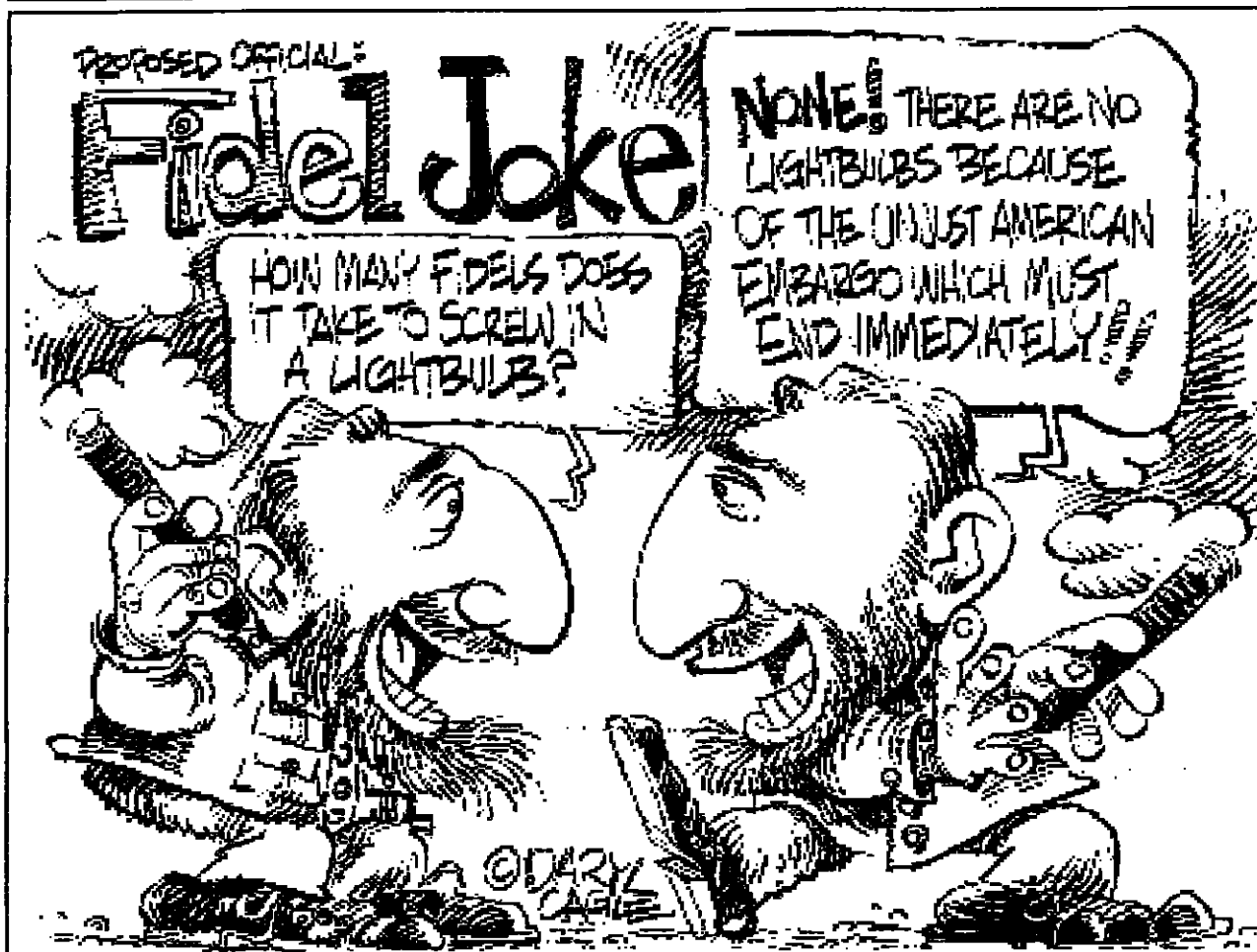
bank, no one was standing in line, and the teller cashed my check in less than a second and gave me - cheerfully - tens, fives and singles without me asking or insisting. I then dashed into a government office. The civil servant was very sweet, the application form was simple, the procedure was easy, and I got what I wanted in less than a second.

At the restaurant, the waiter came promptly, took my order with a friendly smile, brought everything in less than a second, never kept bothering me while I was eating to ask whether everything was all right.

The table was clean, the glass was clean, and the food was to my liking.

No one was smoking; the air was fresh. The waiter brought the check promptly, there was no mistake in the total. He gave me back my change promptly, and I left happy.

I took my car to the mechanic. He was able to find the problem in less than a second, fix it in less than a second, without damaging anything else. There were no black stains whatsoever from his clean trousers on the car.



Bringing down the barriers

Developing World



Riad al Khouri

EXPORTING WITHIN a system of free world trade remains the best economic bet for countries like Jordan, if not for everybody else as well. Despite recent qualifications to the globalisation gospel, and setbacks to the trading strength of some countries in places like East Asia and Latin America, unfettered international commerce remains the only option for the world economy as a whole and in particular for its smaller or poorer components. To take Jordan as an example, the autarkic alternative to free trade would be to use all our phosphates and potash at home, eat all the tomatoes we grow, manufacture all the cars we drive, and produce all the movies we watch. The mind boggles, and even very large countries like China or the United States which could contemplate a kind of self-sufficiency are choosing the international trade option for their economies.

The key of course is to be able to export freely and, as this is a two-way street, to allow free imports. Of course this is an ideal, but one towards which most are trying to move within the context of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Like its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the WTO aims to reduce and if possible abolish trade restrictions. In particular, non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to trade are to be "tariffed," in other words translated into a rough tariff equivalent. For example, if Jordan had put a ceiling of a million units a year on its widget imports, WTO rules would call for the abolition of this quota and its replacement by a tariff that would roughly keep the widgets coming in at that rate, as an interim measure pending the unlimited import of the commodity. When this happens, if the government needs a source of tax income it can slap on a sales duty, but that would have to apply to both locally produced and foreign widgets.

Various grounds such as national security, health protection, and many others are used to impose NTBs, but rules designed to weaken them are starting to be imposed in WTO member and non-member states alike. Jordan, still among the latter, is nevertheless applying WTO regulations as a prelude to joining. Unfortunately, the NTB remains a serious and ubiquitous threat to trade throughout the region. Israel is a notorious practitioner of NTB restrictions, but such Arab states as Jordan,

Lebanon, and Tunisia, among most others, are also guilty of this anti-free trade stance.

Even the Saudis turn out to be into NTBs. Among other examples, the Saudis restrict the import of dates, except the irrigated species, between 22 November and 21 June of each season, and long-life pasteurised liquid milk in packing exceeding one liter is prohibited. However, an NTB that really hurts Jordan in particular is a Saudi prohibition on our fruits and vegetables. The Saudis suspended imports of Jordanian tomatoes, cucumbers and other farm produce seven years ago, claiming wastewater was being used to irrigate many of these crops. True, much of the water used in farms in the Jordan Valley is recycled, and the Saudis have demanded guarantees that water for irrigation was clean and that no muck was seeping in. The Saudis recently reminded Jordan that as long as it uses wastewater, even treated wastewater, to irrigate crops, they will not import Jordanian produce.

Obviously, the use of treated wastewater is widespread in Jordan especially in the Jordan Valley, and will probably become more so. Therefore, in the prevailing circumstances, it is impossible to fulfil the Saudi demand. In fact, Jordanian vegetables are exported to other areas, including Europe, and Saudi Arabia is the only place that insists on not using wastewater.

This Saudi NTB was then imposed against the backdrop of tense relations because of the 1990-91 Gulf crisis. In 1992, Saudi Arabia sent experts to Jordan to investigate the wastewater issue, and they recommended a ban on importing Jordanian vegetables. Another Saudi team is expected to arrive here soon to re-examine the matter; hopefully, in the present friendly political climate, things will be sorted out. However, banking on diplomacy and goodwill is not the best way to enhance the export of Jordanian products. What we must do is look for other markets and not to put all our eggs in

one basket. Our policy should be based on diversification of exports, as well as their destination. We should not rely on exports that are politically motivated. Talking about solidarity and then having to deal with NTBs from our Arab neighbours is obviously harmful and dangerous. The alternative is free trade, a must for all the region.

For Jordan, total exports to Saudi Arabia are important, as can be seen from the table (see box). Though paltry to the Saudis, these sums make up an important chunk of our exports as a whole.

The severity of this NTB can be seen if we recall that up till 1991, Saudi Arabia was the largest importer of Jordan's vegetables and fruits. In 1990, forty per cent of Jordan's produce exports, or JD40 million, went to Saudi Arabia. Back in 1990 Saudi imports of these products totalled 216,000 tonnes. In 1998 they fell to less than 13,000. Over the last few years, Syrian and Lebanese vegetables and fruits have filled the gap left by the absence of Jordanian crops in Saudi Arabia, and even if the Saudis rescind this NTB our produce will face an uphill battle to regain their market share.

So the next time you hear talk of tariff cuts and trade agreements, keep the dreaded NTB in mind. WTO or not, these nasty barriers to trade don't look like they're going to suddenly disappear.

Saudi Arabian imports from Jordan 1993-8 (in millions of JD)

1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998 (January-October)
80	72	70	130	141	83

Palestinian women speak out on women's day

Jerusalem Life



Daoud Kuttab

I HAVE always had a problem with the idea of one day a year being set aside for half the population. As a man I don't feel qualified to speak on the issue of Palestinian women. But because "International Women's Day" has brought special attention to the issue I decided to use my column to give an opportunity to a few women to express the issues that concern them.

Like me, Rawia Shawwa, the outspoken member of the legislative council doesn't like the idea of one day set aside for women just like she doesn't like the idea of a day for democracy. The Palestinian Legislative Council which was inaugurated four years ago on March 7 has declared this day as democracy day and has organised seminars and lectures throughout Palestine dealing with the issue of democracy.

Shawwa, doesn't consider herself a women's activist. "I am active on issues of society," she told me by phone from her Gaza home. She feels that for society to move forward a marked change in the economic situation facing women is needed. "In Gaza, women suffer because of the economic situation." While Gazan men can go abroad or work in Israel, women are left at home and suffer greatly as a result. In order to get out of this predicament Shawwa feels that there is need for social change. "We need to work on raising the level of social awareness so that women will not shy away from work."

Huda Immam, who is working in a Palestinian vocational training centre lays part of the blame on people involved in NGOs. "The gender issue must be dealt with internally just like the saying charity begins at home," Immam says that many institutions that preach gender equality are themselves discriminating by giving job jobs to men. "We must stop thinking that hiring women secretaries and support staff is being gender correct. Women should be involved in policy making jobs and not just token work."

Benaz Someri-Burawi head of adult programming at Al Quds Educational Television feels that women's organisations are wasting their time by targeting women. "They must target decision makers who in our society are still men. At best these organ-

isations should target men and women together. Otherwise, what we will have is relatively conscious and educated city women but in the rural areas, which comprise a majority, women will continue to suffer." Attorney Hanan Bakri from the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling feels that the situation of women in rural areas needs a lot of legal attention. "Our criminal laws are from Napoleon's days and they are very lenient with violence against women. We hear horrible stories of women in the villages being attacked and sometimes killed for the sake of honour."

Bakri wants the Palestinian Legislatures to move quickly to legislate much tougher laws against crimes of passion so that this will deter people from violence against women. She wants a law to give women 10 weeks maternity leave instead of the present 45 days. She is also very passionate about the minimum age of marriage. "There is no religious reason why the age should not be 18 which will be in concert with the mandatory education law." Without being allowed to marry by this age women will have a chance of finishing school. Bakri also would like to see laws restricting arbitrary divorce and social security.

Education of girls was also highlighted at a conference held under the auspices of Suha Arafat who heads the Higher Council for Childhood and Motherhood. One of the speakers Stephan de Vylder from Sweden said that investing in the education of girls goes a long way in developing society for many generations. "Undeveloped countries usually say that they can't afford to invest in education, but developed countries say they can't afford not to invest in education." To the women of Palestine and the world, happy women's day.

What price freedom?

Ten years ago, Europe revelled in its most joyful year since the end of the World War II. One by one the communist regimes of the Eastern Bloc fell with barely a shot fired. Here, some of the people involved, both in the headlines and on the streets tell their stories

By Jonathan Steele,
Ian Traynor and
Peter Lennon

Poland
Lech Walesa — Former president

THE MAN who once captured headlines around the world as the strutting shipyard electrician who overthrew communism and became his country's president nowadays cuts a surprisingly grumpy figure. Perhaps because Lech Walesa, 55, resents not having a decent job. He is also still bitter at being rejected by Poland's voters in 1995 for a second presidential term, partly because many of his Solidarity colleagues turned against him.

So Walesa sits bad-temperedly behind a big desk at the Lech Walesa Institute in Gdansk, 300 yards from the gates of the now re-named Lenin shipyard from which he led the Solidarity trade union's challenge to communism. The institute researches Poland's problems, he says, and catalogues and protects the cultural work of the large Polish community in a dozen foreign countries. He has a short office day and goes home early to his family.

"I'm glad we changed the system peacefully," he says. "But the economic reforms are too slow and chaotic. There is no plan for dealing with agriculture and mining. We haven't found the Polish way." As he spoke, Polish farmers were creating havoc across the

country by blocking roads with tractors in protest at cuts in their earnings. The night before I saw him, Walesa had met the farmers' leader to tell him to do his patriotic duty, whatever that is.

Walesa had two tastes of power. Between August 1980 and December 1981 he led Solidarity, which started as a trade union but quickly grew into a nationwide movement for change. Then came martial law, when the communist leadership under General Wojciech Jaruzelski imposed a state of emergency and locked up Walesa, along with more than 100 other Solidarity activists. After Western sanctions and under pressure from the Pope, who appealed to the general as a fellow-Pole, Jaruzelski released them a few years later.

Encouraged by the new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, his ministers started to talk to Solidarity and then launched formal "Round Table" talks in February 1989.

Walesa was in the limelight again at the head of the opposition team. Solidarity's victory in elections in the summer of 1989 put a non-communist in power as prime minister, and the following year Jaruzelski stepped down early, paving the way for Walesa to be elected in his place.

He is pained by the fate of the Gdansk shipyard, which is facing imminent closure.

"It's like destroying the Statue of Liberty. It's a symbol for Poland and the world," he says.

"Capitalism is not the best way of

running things. Indeed, as Churchill said of democracy, it is the worst system, except for all the others."

Germany

Wolfgang Templin — Dissident

THE DAY the wall came down and thousands danced on its rubble while streaming west, Wolfgang Templin, a contrary character to his core, headed the other way.

The east German dissident was jailed by the Communists in 1988, three years after he helped found the Human Rights Initiative opposition group in east Berlin. The regime then kicked him out of the country against his will. When east Berlin emptied and west Berlin became one huge street party, Templin went home. "Everybody was crossing into west Berlin. I didn't want to be in the west. In 1989 I was 40, the same age as the German Democratic Republic. I saw a lot that was positive in it and felt tied to it. I was a democratic leftist. I didn't believe in Gorbachev, I believed in [Poland's] Solidarity."

"I experienced 1989 as a liberation, but there remains a mental, economic, and social gulf between east and west and it won't be closed any time soon. The failures and the mistakes of a unification that was too fast were colossal. The naivety in the west was unbelievable. West Germany was totally unprepared for unification." His sour criticism is vindicated by the actions of West German leaders at the time. Chancellor Helmut Kohl was so out

of touch with the Berlin drama that he was caught startled on a visit to Warsaw the night the wall came down. Small dissident groups like those involving Templin were less important than in neighbouring Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary. And their significance was further eroded by the subsequent rollover of the big west German party machines and the big money of west German firms. There are no east German anti-communist heroes running the reunited Germany. Templin feels embittered, marginalised, and rather superfluous. "There is no political party in Germany in which I could fit." Neither could he stand the bitchy, incestuous east Berlin intellectual scene once it was deprived of the righteous political struggle. He "fled" to the west, this time voluntarily, in 1995, settling in the west Berlin Bohemian quarter of Kreuzberg. "I can't stand east Berlin any more. Time has stood still there."

Czech Republic

Miroslav Stepan — Former communist bureaucrat

MIROSLAV STEPAN is almost the only senior communist anywhere in eastern Europe who went to prison after the regime fell. A heavy-set figure with his hair in a short greying brush in the style long favoured by younger apparatchiks, he was in charge of the party in Prague in 1989. He got a four-year sentence for ordering the police to use force against demonstrators. The official charge was

"abuse of power."

Now he is secretary-general of what he calls the Czechoslovak Communist Party (even though Czechoslovakia no longer exists). But Stepan is as contradictory in his lifestyle as any other former party bureaucrat. He holds court in a tastelessly furnished, newly-built villa in the expensive Prague suburb of Barrandov. He is a director of Multys, a company that specialises in trade with Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine as well as selling bonds and commercial paper. Asked if this is not odd for the secretary-general of a communist party, Stepan parries genially: "You have to eat." Now 53, Stepan has a bad word for all his former colleagues, including Gorbachev who, he is convinced, fell victim to Western flattery. "He was not able to carry the responsibility of leading the bloc. He spent too much time thinking of his own position." Stepan is sure the November collapse in Prague was orchestrated by modernisers in the STB, the Czech equivalent of the KGB. Too young to have had any role in the Prague Spring of 1968, Stepan sees the post-invasion leader, Gustav Husak, as a man who was too weak by 1989 to resist new demands for change.

He sneers at other older officials as men "who just wanted six months as general secretary so as to get a place in the mausoleum."

Romania

Gheorghe Copos — Businessman

"HE IS clean, there are no black

holes." I was told by Gheorghe Copos, assistant before meeting the Chairman of ANA, one of the largest family business groups in Romania.

This is a routine reassurance when meeting a Romanian businessman, in a country where nearly a decade after the collapse of perhaps the most grotesque dictatorship in the communist bloc, high ranking former senior Securitate officers openly run many of the international businesses. Copos, 46, was born in Transylvania to "a family of peasants who knew the value of money."

In Romania, those who were loyal members of the Communist Party and given access to the West. "During that [Ceausescu] period there were many bad things, maybe more bad things than good," Copos says. "But you must never say that everything that was done at that time was bad." What in particular disturbed him about the regime at the time? "There was this isolation mentality of Romanians which was bad." His business produces cakes, electrical motors and owns shares in the newspaper, Romania Libera. Copos owns the five star Crowne Plaza Floras hotel in Bucharest (single room, \$240 a night). This is unfortunately beyond the reach of most Bucharest citizens, who earn around \$140 a month.

— The Guardian

Internet facilitates the hacker scourge

By Lydia Zajc
Reuters

ATTENTION COMPUTER administrators and everyone with a credit card: You are not safe on the Internet, your information is getting easier to find, and hackers — computer cowboys who break into systems for thrills, sheer artistry, money or revenge — are everywhere.

Those in the know agree there is no network. Web site or system secure enough to keep out determined hackers, who have been breaking into computers over phone lines since the late 1970s and now use the Internet.

"There's no such thing as a perfectly safe computer so someone will always get into it," said Brian O'Higgins, chief technology officer at Texas-based Entrust Technologies Inc., which converts data into code for safer transmission.

Experts say that with the exploding growth of the Internet and sales in cyberspace, there are more opportunities to worm into a company's system and abuse the information found there, such as credit card numbers.

The number of hacker incidents is difficult to track. But in a poll last year the San Francisco-based Computer Security Institute found a dramatic rise in computer crime, ranging from stolen laptops to Internet heists, from a year earlier. It said 64 per cent of corporations and other organisations reported security breaches, up from 16 per cent in 1997.

Most organisations fear a violator from without: a lone young male sitting in his basement, a stereotypical social misfit with the high-powered brain and computer and loads of curiosity to boot.

"It's an instance of mischievous behaviour that's probably age-old in human nature," said analyst David Breiner at investment bank Volpe Brown Whelan & Co. "But the core of it is the dark side of human nature in the information age." One highly public incident was the defiling last year of The New York Times Web site. A group calling itself "Hacking for Girls" replaced the Times' home page with pictures of nudes and discussion about legendary hacker Kevin Mitnick, who faces trial in California on computer-related fraud charges.

Hacker motives range from the excitement of a challenge — be it technical or intellectual — to financial gain and industrial espionage. But the most dangerous motive is revenge by a disgruntled employee, Breiner said.

Professional hacker consultants who are hired to test corporate computer security by mounting attacks on them agree.

Accounting and consulting firm Ernst & Young security consultant

Matunda Nyanchama, whose company just set up its first Canadian computer attack and penetration lab, says the greatest danger comes from your own colleagues.

"About 80 per cent of risks associated with an (information technology) environment come from within. But what we find is that the clients tend to — I think, partly, because of the press — look at these hackers out there on the Internet." In one case, a sour senior staff member was secretly leaking confidential information to a rival firm, Nyanchama said. The staff members' employer was confounded by the competitor, who constantly beat them at their own game.

Robert Clyde, general manager of security management at Rockville, Maryland-based information security company Axiom Technologies Inc., has been on the scene for 20 years and has seen a shift in hacker inspiration.

The hacker mentality, which used to be "look but don't touch" and included help from "white hat" good-guy hackers who point out a company's weak points, has expanded, Clyde said. It now also includes the desire for cold hard cash or even "cyber-terrorism," such as crashing a system.

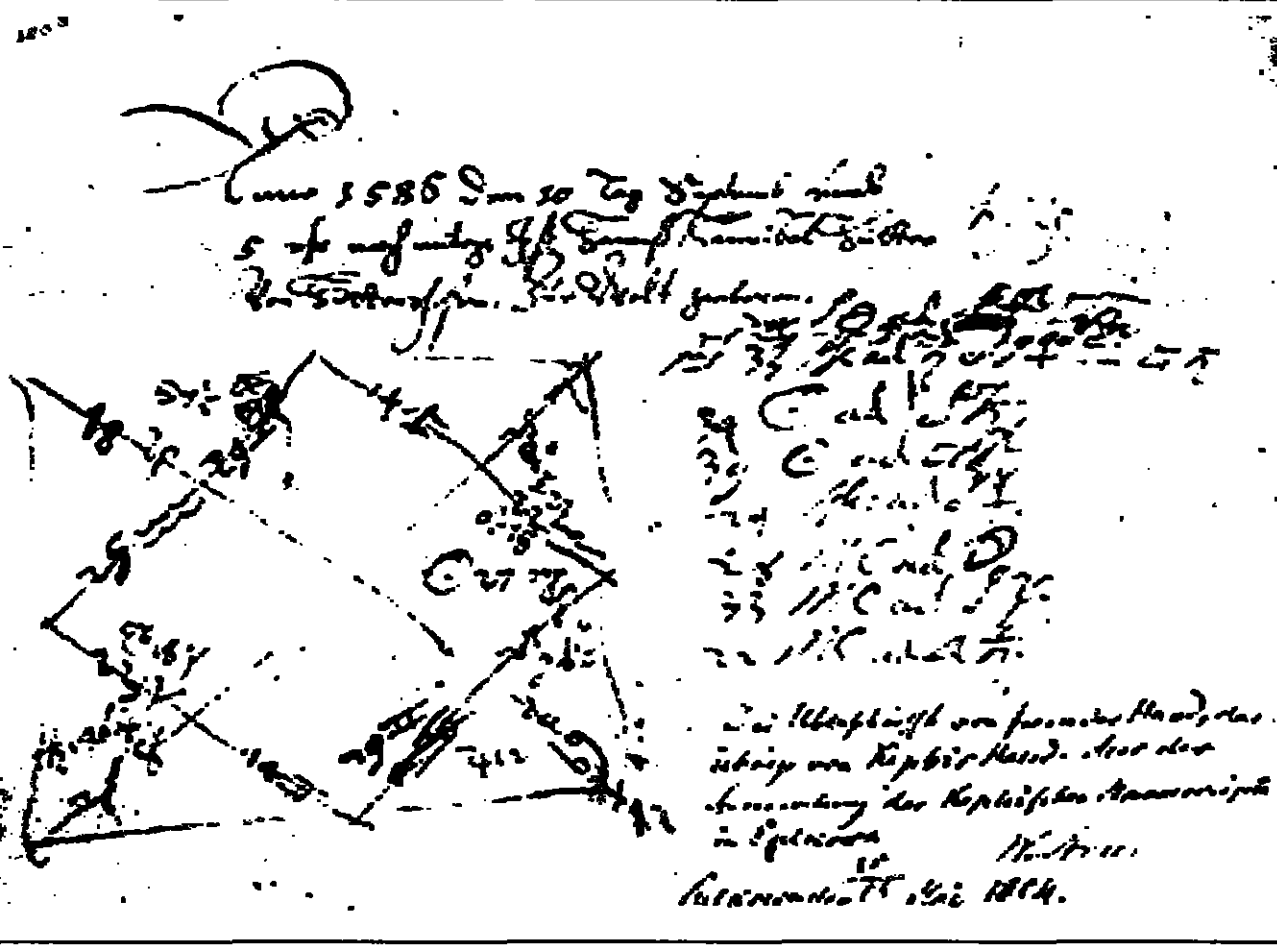
Now there are indications organised crime has filtered in through some nations that ignore the electronic transfer of U.S. funds, he said. For example, an "inside/outside" job means a company hires a computer expert to build a network. For a small fee from a criminal group the expert will deliberately make a dumb mistake, leaving an electronic hole through which others can siphon money to private bank accounts.

Some hacking cases are well known, such as the assault on Pentagon computers by an Israeli teenager known as "Analyzer" and a friend, who were caught last year. But companies often are penetrated and do not tell the public. Or they may not have realised it themselves.

Many banks have already been hit to some extent, Entrust's O'Higgins said. One way to ensure relative safety, he said, is encryption: coding information to make sure it cannot be read without an electronic key. One financial institution came to Entrust in a panic after losing some 350,000 potential credit card numbers following the theft of a computer.

Clyde attends some of the hacker conventions whose participants range from "white hats" and government agents to people with their teeth filed into points to resemble vampires.

But he said, "the scary ones are the ones who aren't like that. They're pretty professional and do it for the money. These guys don't get caught."



Anthony Misch, an astronomer at the Lick Observatory of the University of California-Santa Cruz, perusing an archive drawer of miscellaneous documents has come across a 400-year-old horoscope, written by one of history's greatest astronomers, Johannes Kepler (Reuters photo)

Hi-tech speakers that are heard but not seen

By Bruce Stanley
Associated Press

IN A twist to the Victorian adage about well-behaved children, a British high-technology firm has developed a loudspeaker that can be heard, but not seen.

NXT plc says its transparent speakers — glass or plexiglass panels that emit sound through subtle vibrations — rival conventional speakers in quality.

The panel speakers are much less bulky than conical speakers, so the new technology should allow for further miniaturisation of electronic devices like laptop computers and televisions, the company says.

See-through speakers could, in theory, be as large as movie screens and small enough to fit on a business card. Refinements in the technology might even enable a car windshield to double as a stereo speaker.

"You can let your imagination run wild. You don't have to think of these oblong boxes," said Jon Vizor, NXT's marketing director.

NXT predicts that the first products containing transparent speakers could hit the market within 18 months. They are likely to be laptops, televisions and home-theatre systems.

The transparent speakers are triggered by an electronic "exciter" the size and shape of a coin that is attached to the edge of the speaker panel. The exciter emits an impulse that causes the panel to vibrate, and the vibrations, which are invisible to the human

eye, create sound waves.

Unlike conventional loudspeakers, which contain a diaphragm that moves back and forth like a piston, different parts of the transparent speaker panel vibrate independently. The panel, or screen, ripples in a complex pattern that seems almost random.

Under close magnification, the speaker surface resembles a three-dimensional map of mountainous terrain, with each peak punching the air to help create sound waves. "It's like hundreds and hundreds of minuscule volcanoes erupting all over the screen," Vizor said.

NXT says its see-through speakers have a wider frequency than conventional ones, giving them a deeper bass and a less tinny sound. And they project sound in all directions at once, making it unnecessary, for example, that an audiophile face a stereo speaker to hear music at its clearest.

Headquartered in London, the 3-year-old company based its research on work its scientists originally did to reduce cockpit noise in jet aircraft for Britain's defence ministry. "It's quite a novel technology," says Matthew Alleyne, a technology reporter for the Electronics Times — a London-based weekly newspaper that covers Britain's electronics industry. "I would say it's fairly revolutionary." So revolutionary, in fact, that some electronics industry watchers aren't even aware of it.

"If it's space-saving and weight-saving, that sounds like great stuff," said Tom Wills-Sandford of the Federation of the Electron-

ics Industry, a British trade association.

NXT used similar technology to develop an opaque speaker panel two years ago. Some 90 firms, from NEC Corp. in Japan to Philips Electronics N.V. in the Netherlands, have paid for licences to that technology.

Opaque panels are already available on a wide array of electronics goods, including personal computers and portable CD players. U.S. audio companies licensed for the technology include Harman International Industries Inc., maker of JBL and Infinity speakers, and Alpine Electronics Research Inc.

Wharfedale International Ltd, a firm based 100 kms north London in Huntingdon, uses NXT's technology to make an opaque speaker camouflaged as a ceiling tile.

It also markets a speaker designed as a framed picture, for use in homes, hotels or restaurants. Customers can paint or decorate the white speaker panel however they like.

As for transparent speakers, Vizor says the technology for them is still so new that NXT has yet to start selling licences for it.

Peerless Fabrikkerne A/S, a Danish company that makes the exciters for speakers using NXT technology, is trying to develop its own type of transparent speakers.

Company President Nils Erik Kristensen, speaking from Copenhagen, acknowledged NXT's lead in the see-through technology race. But he suggested that competition in transparent speakers may not be far off. "It's certainly something that a lot of companies are looking at," he said.

Village life

chip talk

By Jean-Claude Elias

TWO PHENOMENA are showing us how much the Global Village concept is a reality. The publicity around the Y2K (year 2000) problem and the recent introduction in Jordan of the ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) are excellent proofs that the Kingdom is living in perfect synchronicity with the developed world and that the village is now smaller than ever.

The Y2K issue has caught the attention of Jordanians from all walks of life. The number of TV broadcasts, lectures, conferences on the question, and the coverage by the local media are growing and becoming more important as we're getting closer to the dreaded day. Even those who are not directly manipulating computers or are not involved in some form of data processing feel, quite rightly, that somehow the problem is going to affect them too.

Indeed, the infamous last 2 digits that keep the year in the date setting and display in a wide array of equipment and machinery are far from being limited to computers. From VCRs to process control units in plants and factories, they all depend on the date to operate correctly.

People are getting anxious to the point that, perhaps unconsciously, they can't wait to see the "99" turn to "00" and take them back to the year 1900. In addition to the awareness campaigns and plans of action that the private sector is undertaking, the public sector also seems to realise how important it is to explain the problem and its implications. Earlier this week, a full page ad appeared in an Arabic daily in Amman, published by the National Information Centre and clarifying, at least in broad outlines, the problem.

Whether Jordan has started to tackle the Y2K problem early enough is another story. Compared to the United States, even some Western European countries were behind schedule in addressing the issue.

On another front, the Jordanian Telecommunications Company announced last week that the long-awaited ISDN digital telephone network is now operational and that it was ready to take subscriptions from businesses and from individuals. The main advantages of ISDN over the traditional analogue system are increased speed of transmission and higher reliability. Practically it means that downloading software and images (both still and motion) over the Internet is going to be much easier and faster than before. Some applications like on-line video that were either difficult or not practical with analogue lines will become routine.

Although some new communication technology "beyond ISDN" has been recently announced in the United States, the fact that the Kingdom is offering ISDN to its citizens is certainly a step in the right direction and it places the country on a par with the most advanced ones.

Jordan is very much at the heart of village life.

European Central Bank official sees three currencies dominating world economy

TOKYO (AFP) — The dollar, the euro and the yen will dominate the world economy but only if Japan restores growth and lifts obstacles to promoting its currency, a European Central Bank (ECB) official said Wednesday.

"I don't think the world will be bi-polar. The yen has an international role already," Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, a member of the ECB board, told reporters here.

"What I see ahead is Japan emerging from its difficulties and removing obstacles to the internationalisation of the yen," he said.

Padoa-Schioppa, responsible for the bank's international relations, has just completed an Asian tour, in which he travelled to China, South Korea and Hong Kong.

Before the arrival of the euro in January, "we had two stars (the dollar and the yen) and nebula" in world currency markets, he said. Now with European money-

tary union "Japan is third and maybe declining because of the economic problems," he added.

"One of the aspects of the Asian crisis is the coming to an end of the dollar peg," for currencies in the region, Padoa-Schioppa said.

"The anchor role of the dollar in Europe ended in the 70s." Then it was replaced with the German mark, which opened the way to monetary union.

"In this part of the world the situation is completely different and the dollar has preserved its anchor role," he said. "Now many people are asking themselves what should be the role of the yen in the future."

"For countries in Asia the economic crisis forced them to think about the currency situation," he said. "There is a disposition to interrogate themselves about the role of the East Asian economies and particularly Japan. It was not the case when everything was going fine and there was no such event as the

euro to focus the mind." Now the euro "gives the impression that you don't have the U.S. dollar only anymore and makes people reflect on how important regional cooperation can be," he added.

"Ultimately the role of a currency is consistent with the economic strengths of the country. Since last summer important new steps have been taken in Japan. The question is to see how the implementation will proceed and what the results will be," the ECB official indicated.

Japan's government has poured billions of dollars into stimulus packages and a broad bank recapitalisation programme.

"The international role of the currency requires obstacles to be removed but this is not a black and white situation," Padoa-Schioppa said.

"The removal of obstacles is a step to be made but that does not mean moving from zero to 100 per cent," he concluded.

Boost growth with money for poor, rich states told

GENEVA (R) — A United Nations agency has called for industrialised countries to inject more money into developing economies to stimulate global growth.

Yilmaz Akyuz, the chief macro-economist at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said it was in the rich states' interests to help.

He warned of a global political backlash if the gap between rich and poor nations continued to grow.

"It appears that for the second year developing countries' growth will fall short of growth in industrial countries," Akyuz told a news conference to present an UNCTAD report on global economic conditions and prospects for 1999.

He suggested a remedy of debt relief, regional aid programmes and direct injections of liquidity into developing economies to raise demand, imports and growth.

Akyuz said studies had shown that direct injections

of money — in the form of aid, grants or debt cancellation — was likely to provide a stronger stimulus for growth than fiscal measures.

"This cannot be adequately done by drawing on the resources of multilateral financial institutions which have been drained by financial rescue operations," the UNCTAD report said.

"By contrast, Japan and the European Union are in a position to play an important role in providing a direct liquidity injection by recycling part of their (trade) surpluses in various ways to developing countries in order to revive global demand, boost trade and accelerate growth," it added.

Akyuz said if the industrialised north stood by and did nothing, a development crisis loomed.

"I'm not sure this would be in the best interests of the U.S., Europe or anybody else, if the South gets into a development crisis with all its possible implications for global peace," he said.

Exchange Rates Wednesday, 10-03-99 ACCESS 4848888

CURRENCY	JORDAN DINAAR	SAUDI RIYAL	EGYPT POUND	IRAN RIAL	OMAN RIAL	QATAR RIAL	KUWAIT DINAAR	EGYPT POUND	US DOLLAR
JORDAN DINAAR	1.0000	0.1858	0.1927	1.8777	1.8387	0.1945	0.2307	0.2977	3.7500
SAUDI RIYAL	5.2975	1.0000	1.0208	9.9472	9.7406	1.0301	12.2249	1.0029	3.7500
EGYPT POUND	5.1863	0.8796	1.0000	9.7441	9.5416	1.0091	11.9752	1.0781	3.6745
IRAN RIAL	0.5326	0.1027	0.1048	1.0000	1.0000	0.1058	1.2357	0.1130	0.3851
OMAN RIAL	5.1427	0.9708	0.9910	9.5585	9.4559	1.0000	11.8877	1.0684	3.6412
QATAR RIAL	0.4333	0.0816	0.0835	0.8137	0.7998	0.0843	1.0000	0.9500	0.3668
KUWAIT DINAAR	4.8126	0.9087	0.9276	8.9386	8.8506	0.9360	11.1082	1.0000	3.4330
EGYPT POUND	21.2288	4.0074	4.0509	39.8621	39.0339	4.1260	48.9696	4.4130	15.3500
IRAN RIAL	1.4124	0.2686	0.2722	2.6332	2.5971	0.2746	3.2895	2.5234	0.6100
OMAN RIAL	0.8723	0.1647	0.1681	1.6379	1.6038	0.1698	2.0130	0.1912	0.6176
QATAR RIAL	2.5259	0.4787	0.4866	4.7418	4.6433	0.4810	5.8278	0.5245	1.7879
KUWAIT DINAAR	2.0681	0.3900	0.3981	3.8786	3.7990	0.4018	4.7675	0.4292	1.4629
EGYPT POUND	8.4688	1.5887	1.6320	15.9021	15.5147	1.6488	19.5431	1.7564	5.9589
IRAN RIAL	1.7010	0.3211	0.3278	3.1940	3.1276	0.3308	3.9254	0.3534	1.2043
OMAN RIAL	2.6462	0.5071	0.5149	5.0425	4.9315	0.5133	6.1668	0.5811	2.0120
QATAR RIAL	11.5216	2.1748	2.2203	21.6345	21.1850	2.2404	26.5863	2.5838	8.1573
KUWAIT DINAAR	34.9893	6.7191	6.8175	66.9421	65.9588	6.8612	81.9907	7.9255	26.8760
EGYPT POUND	52.0847	9.8320	10.0370	97.8014	95.7894	10.1280	120.1858	10.9104	36.6760
IRAN RIAL	2.2121	0.4178	0.4263	4.1537	4.0674	0.4301	5.1045	0.4566	1.5882
OMAN RIAL	4.1538	0.7638	0.7805	7.7579	7.6359	0.7875	9.5334	0.8527	2.9430
QATAR RIAL	1.7483	0.3143	0.3192	3.1371	3.0690	0.3177	3.8616	0.4061	1.3430
KUWAIT DINAAR	17.7850	3.3535	3.4234	33.3579	32.6648	3.4544	40.9961	3.8905	12.5786
EGYPT POUND	2.1419	0.4043	0.4128	4.0220	3.9384	0.4165	5.0240	0.4500	1.5165
IRAN RIAL	1.2807	0.2436	0.2487	2.4326	2.3733	0.2510	2.9786	0.2521	0.8138

CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	EURO	SWISS FRANC	GERMAN MARK	FRANCE FRANC	UK POUND	ITALY LIRA	SPAIN PESA
US DOLLAR	1.0000	0.9192	0.5953	0.6536	0.1668	0.6354	0.4864	5.6439
EURO	0.8176	1.0000	0.3454	0.4222	0.1030	0.5138	0.3956	4.9458
SWISS FRANC	1.7879	2.8550	1.0000	1.2222	0.3382	1.4646	0.8675	10.1014
GERMAN MARK	1.4628	2.3886	0.8182	1.0000	0.2440	1.2146	0.7282	8.7648
FRANCE FRANC	5.9659	9.7098	3.3358	4.0588	1.0000	4.9787	2.9756	35.4619
UK POUND	120.4300	185.0003	67.3584	82.3284	20.0854	1.0000	59.7845	680.4167
ITALY LIRA	2.0744	3.3617	1.4287	1.7371	0.3380	1.9727	1.0000	11.3611
SPAIN PESA	8.1573	13.3303	4.8525	5.9785	3.9055	6.7735	0.0485	166.0377
EURO	17.6692	28.6590	3.8996	4.7897	1.2519	14.9609	5.7863	70.0000
GERMAN MARK	36.8780	59.7098	20.6235	25.2062	6.1502	30.6203	18.3526	224.3440
FRANCE FRANC	1.5882	2.5359	0.8780	1.0707	0.2512	1.3025	0.7775	9.4267
UK POUND	2.9402	4.7608	1.6445	2.0100	0.4894	2.4414	1.4595	16.8118
ITALY LIRA	0.5235	0.8579	0.2963	0.3622	0.0884	0.4399	0.2630	2.9903
SPAIN PESA	12.5778	20.3556	7.0348	8.5983	2.0877	10.4439	6.2438	71.0919
EURO	1.5185	2.4555	0.8482	1.0367	0.2529	1.2582	0.7529	9.5665
GERMAN MARK	0.8138	1.4797	0.5111	0.6247	0.1524	0.7598	0.4526	5.1620

CURRENCY	US DOLLAR	EURO	SWISS FRANC	GERMAN MARK	FRANCE FRANC	UK POUND	ITALY LIRA	SPAIN PESA
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GERMAN MARK	0.8138	1.4797	0.5111	0.6247	0.1524	0.7598	0.4526	5.1620

STOCK MARKET	INDEX	CLOSING	LAST CLOSE	CHANGE
FRANKFURT	DAX	4758.48	4758.48	-30.23
HONG KONG	HANG SENG	10532.95	10532.95	-288.98
LONDON	FT-100	6237.70	6237.70	-33.55
NEW YORK	NYSE COMPOSITE	9023.75	9023.75	-1.17
NEW YORK	AMEX COMPOSITE	711.45	711.45	-0.73
NEW YORK	S&P 500	1279.84	1279.84	-2.68
TOKYO	Nikkei 225	15480.00	15480.00	-283.30
TAIPEI	TSE 40	4159.80	4159.80	-18.17

Oil producers to slash output, Saudi Arabia says

SHAYBA. Saudi Arabia (AFP) — OPEC and independent producers will agree on output cuts before the group's meeting in Vienna on March 23, Saudi Oil Minister Ali Ben Ibrahim Al-Nuaimi told AFP Wednesday.

"Producer countries, OPEC and non-OPEC, will agree on lowering the level of production before the meeting," the minister said after talks with his Arab

Gulf counterparts, without specifying the level of reductions.

But it would be "substantial," said his Qatari counterpart Abdullah Al Attiya, on the sidelines of the inauguration of the giant Shayba oil field in the Rub Al Khali (Empty Quarter) desert of southeast Saudi Arabia.

In London, Brent climbed on the Saudi news to \$11.94 from \$11.56 at close on Tuesday.

An official statement issued after the meeting said the main aim was to eliminate the excess on world inventories.

"The countries meeting in Shayba shall take all the necessary measures, in close consultation with OPEC and non-OPEC producing countries, most important of which is a considerable reduction in current production, sufficient to remove excess inventories from the

market," the statement said.

"The ministers expressed their optimism regarding the possibility of reaching an effective agreement, in the next few weeks, for the purpose of bringing stability to the market and significantly improving prices," it added.

Low prices were "neither in the interest of the producing countries, nor in the interest of the petroleum industry. This situation also has a negative impact on the

global economy," the statement added. "This is not acceptable and should not continue."

The United Arab Emirates, a notable absentee, agreed with the outcome of the Shayba meeting, said Attiya. Nuaimi said that differences between Iran and Saudi Arabia, both OPEC heavyweights, had now been "settled" following a meeting of their oil ministers in Riyadh on Sunday.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Try not to lose your temper with an older person today, especially the one who hands out the grades or paychecks. You might think this person doesn't like you, but the opposite is more likely true. You've been making a very good impression lately, when you weren't wisecracking. Control that tendency and you might even earn a bonus.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) If you can start your week-end early, you really ought to do it. This is a fabulous day to travel, with a couple of minor annoyances. You can get by those relatively easily, if you watch where you're going. You also need to watch what you're saying. Don't let the cat out of the bag.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) There's an argument brewing today, but it doesn't concern you personally, so you'd be wise to stay out of it. The people who are hassling with each other can reach a compromise more quickly if they don't get nervous. Just focus on the job you're supposed to be doing, and let them work it out among themselves.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You may have to shout today to be heard over all the noise and confusion. If you can make sure your ideas get across through subtle ways, by all means, go ahead. You're a master at innuendo, but today it might take

something a little bolder than that. Don't be afraid to speak up. LEO: (July 22 to August 21) The work you've been putting off all week is finally going to catch up with you. Don't let it take you by surprise. Be prepared, and be willing to work overtime if necessary, but don't complain. You've had so much fun lately, this extra bit of work will seem like nothing.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) The work you've been doing lately should be starting to show results. You can stop trying to convince your friends that it's all been worthwhile. They'll be able to see that with their own eyes when you invite them over, which may not be tonight. Tonight you should save for a more private celebration.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Looks like somebody's pushing you to make a decision, but you're not quite ready yet.

Don't let yourself get pressured into acting hastily. Decisions are not easy for Libras under the best of circumstances, and when you get rattled, you'll probably choose badly. Just explain that you're still collecting data.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) If you're running into a bunch of new problems today, congratulations. That means you've solved all the old ones. It's always a sign of growth when you don't know what you're doing anymore, and that's the territory you may find yourself in now. Not to worry. You learn quickly under pressure.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Today there are some things you'll no longer put up with. That means you can't just sit there and ignore them any longer. Something that's been bothering you is going to have to be straightened

out, and you're probably the one who's going to do it. Be bold. CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Watch out for breakdowns today. Something you thought was going to be there, isn't. Somebody you expected to call you, won't. You might miss a phone call yourself. Communications are garbled: the computers might even go down. Make sure you back up everything. It's a good habit in general; today it's a requirement.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Be careful today to express yourself clearly. You won't be the only one having trouble getting the point across. You should be more successful at it than most people, since you do tend to be careful with your words. Advise caution to a friend who hasn't yet acquired that habit.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You might notice today you're a little short of cash. You may have to postpone something you'd like to do, but don't despair. You'll find a way around this dilemma by going a little farther out of your way. In other words, don't pay top dollar if you can get a bargain elsewhere. The time you spend looking could equal quite a lot of money.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

THE Daily Crossword Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

TMSPuzzles@aol.com

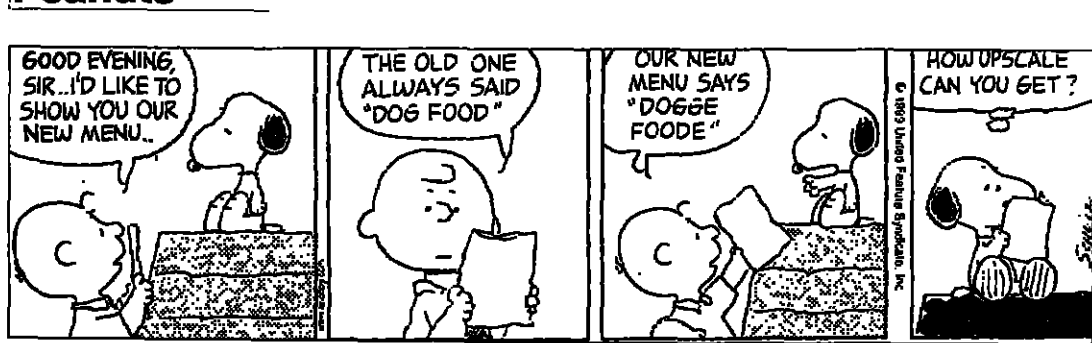
ACROSS

- Went fast
- Relain
- Syllables
- Mess maker
- Pocket bread
- Delf authority
- Shade of blue
- Business letter
- abbr.
- That is (to say):
- Latin
- Yard-work tool
- Hemingway title
- Actress Moran
- Removes the cover
- Louisiana cuisine
- Soothsayers
- Spanish cheers
- Will's contents
- Accomplished
- Grace Paley title
- Silly billy
- Glossy paint
- Excessive anger
- Creates suds
- "The Silver Streak" co-star
- Boredom
- Genet Davis sitcom
- Beethoven title
- Foundry form
- Glossy
- Trolley car
- Pot entrance fee
- Bequeath
- Carson's successor
- Parakeet staple
- Called off
- Long-haired pack animals

DOWN

- Verbal skirmish
- Heart of the matter
- Back of the kitchen?
- Ballerina
- Singer Lopez
- Defensive fortification
- First victim
- Not as much as
- Choir voice
- Long, thin
- Term of tenancy
- Like some buckets
- Consecrate
- Container with a tap
- Music critic
- Ned
- Soft drink flavor
- For pity's sake!
- New York team
- Supporters
- Facility
- 30 & others: Latin
- Sicilian volcano
- Pretense
- 6/6/44
- remembrance
- Othello's nemesis
- Color changer
- Use more
- Off course
- Supplied the cash
- In favor of
- Thompson and Samms
- Nary a soul
- "48 Hrs." star
- Martin of "L.A. Story"
- Queried
- of Wight
- Welsh valley
- Main part of a bust
- Vicinity
- War wagon?
- Famous cookie man

Peanuts



Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Reducing interest rates, production costs top list of private sector demands

** ACCORDING TO Hani Al Khulili, board member of the Amman Chamber of Commerce, lowering interest rates in order to encourage investments and activate the industrial and commercial sectors, is one of the imbalances that the new government should tackle to reinvigorate the economy. He also sought higher cash liquidity which he described as "very scarce" at present.

He said the government should address the issue of debts owed by traders to banks through rescheduling the credits, especially those who are well-known, in order to enable them to continue their businesses instead of declaring themselves bankrupt.

Khalili called for upgrading the cadres of the Ministry of Industry and Trade and all the departments and institutions affiliated to it and for computerising the measures at the ministry. He said the government should fight against bureaucracy and set up an independent entity for investment to be directly linked to the prime minister. The entity would facilitate investment procedures from the point of receiving the investor until finalising all the measures. Khalili added noting that that was the process in which Egypt was successful in attracting investors.

"The government should work for signing free trade agreements with Arab countries to expedite operating in accordance with the Arab free trade zone," the board member of the Amman Chamber of Commerce stressed. Moreover, he called for activating the mechanism of "exporting" Jordanian labour to Arab Gulf countries in order to ease the unemployment problem and replace the foreign workers in the Kingdom with local job-seekers.

Khalili concluded by mentioning the problem between foodstuff traders and inspectors from the Supply Department. In this

regard, he called for easing the restriction imposed on those merchants especially the control measures on announcing prices on products which are not under priced by the government.

Mohammad Al Tell, president of the Zarga Chamber of Industry said: "If the government wants to achieve a real activity in the area of investments it should place as its top priority the transparency in adopting and implementing decisions."

He stressed the issue of supervision and control as being a main and pressing demand that requires immediate decisions. "The numerous parties entrusted with health, environmental, municipal... etc. controls and supervision create an atmosphere of confusion and discord as each entity carries its work independent from the other," Tell said. He urged unifying the control and supervision in one institution to prevent harming any economic activity.

Tell emphasised the need to follow a unified tax policy on various industries and investments instead of the different types of taxes that investors have to go through.

Fathi Sughayar, a board member of the Amman Chamber of Commerce, demanded a real support for the private sector through reducing production cost such as electricity, water and fuel charges in addition to interest rates.

He also requested the government to assist in exports and opening new markets for Jordanian products.

He concluded by asking the government to comprehensively review the bases on which the civil service and military consumer corporations were established as the commercial sector is suffering from the unfair competition of the two corporations (Al Dustour).

A.F.M TRADE Wednesday, 10-03-99 ACCESS 4646868

Company	Open	Close	Change
BANKS			
ARAB BK	222.500	221.500	-0.45%
NTL BK	1.500	1.480	-1.33%
BK OF JORDAN	1.330	1.320	-0.75%
THE HOUSING BK	2.860	2.840	-0.70%
JO. GULF BK	0.650	0.650	0.00%
JO. ISLAMIC BK	1.680	1.680	0.00%
JO. INVEST. & FIN. BK	1.300	1.330	+2.31%
BEIT ELMAL	0.670	0.700	+4.48%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.520	0.520	0.00%

BANKS INDEX 288.150 point = -0.44%

INSURANCE			
JO. FRENCH INS	2.650	2.650	0.00%
INSURANCE INDEX			
	126.080		0.00%

SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.690	1.670	-1.18%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.920	0.910	-1.09%
AL-ZARQA FOR EDU	0.960	0.980	+2.08%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1.130	1.130	0.00%
SERVICES INDEX			
	114.030		-0.18%

INDUSTRY

AT-TANQUEEP	1.050	1.050	0.00%
CEMENT	3.770	3.760	-0.27%
PHOSPHATE	2.330	2.310	-0.86%
ARAB POTASH	4.200	4.200	0.00%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.850	10.850	0.00%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.080	3.050	-0.97%
CERAMIC IND	1.270	1.250	-1.57%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.510	1.520	+0.66%
NTL STEEL	0.630	0.650	+3.17%
DAR AL DAWA	6.150	6.150	0.00%
MIDDEL EAST COMPLEX	0.550	0.550	0.00%
JO. STEEL	1.000	1.000	0.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.780	1.730	-2.81%
CHLORINE	1.180	1.180	0.00%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.400	0.00%
PETRO-CHEMICAL	0.280	0.270	-3.57%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	0.970	0.980	+1.03%
NTL CABLE	0.810	0.810	0.00%
GULPHO-CHEMICALS	0.420	0.420	0.00%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHAR	1.280	1.290	+0.78%
KAWTHER	0.370	0.390	+5.41%
EL-ZAY	1.280	1.270	-0.78%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0.600	0.620	+3.33%
IND. RESOURCES	0.440	0.440	0.00%
NTL ALUMINIUM	0.820	0.830	+1.22%
INDUSTRY INDEX			
	96.970		-0.21%

PARALLEL

EXPORT BK 752	0.940	0.950	+1.06%
JO. TRADING FACILITIES	0.420	0.410	-2.38%
JO. INTL. INS	0.650	0.680	+4.62%
ARAB FINANCIAL INVE	0.470	0.490	+4.26%
AL-EKBAL	0.880	0.890	+1.14%
AL-SHARQ	1.100	1.100	0.00%
MEDICAL APPLIANCES	0.450	0.470	+4.44%
AL DAWLJAH	0.580	0.710	+21.72%
ARAB INVESTORS	1.080	1.080	0.00%
ARAB INTL. TRADE	0.180	0.180	0.00%
SPECIALIZED INVE	0.650	0.620	-4.62%
OPTICAL & AUDIAL	0.340	0.350	+2.94%
CENTURY	1.190	1.190	0.00%
NAMICO	0.170	0.160	-5.88%
UNION TOBACCO	3.450	3.400	-1.45%
AL-RAZI	0.510	0.500	-1.96%
UNITED ENG. IND	0.180	0.190	+5.56%
INTL. CERAMIC	0.380	0.380	0.00%
NTL POULTRY	0.560	0.550	-1.79%
NUTRI DAR	0.730	0.740	+1.37%
GRAND INDEX			
	183.48		-0.36%

JORDAN TIMES FAX: 5693337

BNP unveils surprise offer for Paribas, Societe Generale

PARIS (R) — French bank Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP) has launched a surprise bid to gobble up rivals Paribas and Societe Generale, a pair of financial institutions that had already agreed to merge with each other.

The bold takeover offer, if it succeeds, would create Europe's biggest bank by far in terms of assets and among the largest in the world.

"The idea is to create a French champion in the European banking industry and a major player at world level," a BNP spokeswoman told Reuters.

She said BNP had offered to buy all outstanding shares of both banks, which recently announced their own plans to merge into one of the world's largest banks.

In what was believed to be the first unsolicited bid in modern French banking history, BNP was offering 11 of its shares for every eight Paribas shares and 15 BNP shares for every seven Societe Generale shares, she said.

A corporate financier said he was mystified by the BNP plan.

"At first glance I can't see what's in this for BNP shareholders, but perhaps that will become clearer later," said the London-based financier, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"This must raise the pos-

sibility of a counter-bid for BNP (by takeover targets Societe Generale and Paribas)," he added.

The twin BNP offers were initially disclosed by the CMF financial market regulatory agency in a statements issued well after the close of trading on Tuesday.

CMF said BNP had notified it of its intentions at 8.30 p.m. (1930 GMT).

The BNP spokeswoman told Reuters its takeover offers would create a group with a stock market capitalisation of 340 billion francs (\$56 billion).

There would be major consequences in terms of staff layoffs from offers she described as "attractive" to the shareholders of the two target banks.

"There'll be no collective layoffs, this is important," she said.

BNP's offer is being presented by Lazard Freres et Cie, Goldman Sachs International and Banexi, BNP's own investment banking subsidiary, according to the CMF.

Societe Generale and Paribas had no immediate comment.

According to the CMF statement, BNP conditioned its offers on its ability to acquire at least a majority of each bank's outstanding shares.

But it reserved the right to pursue the offer even if the targeted percentage is not reached, CMF said.

BNP also conditioned

the offers on approval by its shareholders of the issuance of the necessary shares to carry out the takeovers, the CMF said.

It said the BNP board of directors had pledged at a meeting held on Tuesday to submit the necessary resolutions to its shareholders.

The CMF said it had asked the Paris bourse to suspend trade in the shares of all three banks.

Societe Generale and Paribas surprised financial markets in early February by announcing a 15.1 billion euro merger that would create France's largest bank and fuel the global trend towards fewer, but larger, financial institutions.

BNP has been under pressure since then to strike an alliance of its own, but has insisted it would not be rushed into a deal for the sake of a deal.

Chairman Michael Pebercau told a news conference this month BNP would consider "opportunistic" external growth only if it created shareholder value and did not endanger performance goals.

BNP also said last month it was interested in an "industrial project" with state-owned Credit Lyonnais, which is to be privatised later this year.

It was not immediately clear how the new offers would affect those plans.

U.S. firm pays \$650 million for Israeli software company

TEL AVIV (AFP) — BMC Software of Houston, Texas, has bought Israel's New Dimension Software for \$650 million in the biggest buyout ever of a local company, officials said Tuesday.

New Dimension, which is traded on the NASDAQ market in New York and had sales of \$93.6 million in 1998, signed a share purchase and tender

agreement with BMC on Monday, said Dalia Prashker, one of New Dimension's three founders.

BMC, the world's 12th largest independent software vendor, paid cash for the Israeli specialist in enterprise management software.

"This was a great deal," said Prashker, who founded New Dimension with

two partners in 1983. The company came out four years later with a highly successful systems management programme for corporate users.

BMC's acquisition of New Dimension came ahead of the U.S. firm's planned merger on March 30 with Boole and Baggage. New Dimension's exclusive distributor in Europe.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Somebody's been saving good things about you behind your back. Isn't it nice when that happens? It's because you're authentic, that's why. You do your best and keep your word. But today it looks like somebody's going to ask for what you said you'd have done by now. So if it isn't quite finished, better hurry.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) If you could go where you want to go and do what you want to do today, which does look possible, you may have to do without something else. Unfortunately, this is one of those either-or situations, so if a loved one gets left behind, promise to make up for it later.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Ask a friend to help you get something you want today from far away. You could do this by yourself, but you might get a better price if you go through a friend of a friend. Meanwhile, be there for someone who's going through a rough time. This person doesn't like to show emotions, but you'll be able to tell that a kind word means a lot.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) Some of the others are still making a lot of noise, but you're probably on the inside track. Looks like you know what's going on behind the scenes, and they don't. That's why they have to holler and you get to sit there smiling. Don't forget to speak up if you need to, though. You're much more powerful than you probably realise.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Continue to dig in and do whatever needs to be done, and then some. If you offer to do extra, you'll make a fabulous impression on one who's been watching you lately. Head off the rumours that you're a party animal by proving you can go beyond the call of duty.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Don't mess up a good thing today with a silly quarrel. It looks like such a situation would most likely occur around money, specifically money you and somebody else share. That could be the household account, for example, and how to spend it. Don't get hung up on the details. You'll actually save money by being generous now.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) It might be a good idea to postpone your date until tomorrow or the next day. Complications could arise, making it difficult for you and your friend to connect. If you really want to do it now, just allow extra time to reach your destination. Meanwhile, you may solve a work-related problem by using a trick you learned at home.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Sometimes you're pretty quiet. Other people might even think you're shy. Truth is, you're pretty strong, bold, even brassy sometimes. But you ought to keep that part of yourself hidden for a little while. Looks like you could scare away somebody you're trying to attract.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You may have wondered where the money will come from, and today, odds are good you'll find out. Unfortunately, it's probably not from the lottery. Instead of waiting for your ship to come in, dust off old skills and get busy.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Be careful to explain all the little details in a financial transaction today. You don't want any misunderstanding here, and if you pay attention the first time through, there won't be. Romance is a little bit more difficult, unfortunately. The person you're trying to talk to may not be in the mood to listen. If so, try again tomorrow.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You may hear something today that's very interesting, even a little outrageous, but do yourself and everybody else a big favour. Don't pass it along. Let the gossip stop with you, especially if it's potentially harmful. Advise somebody else to do the same.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You should be able to express yourself pretty well today, so maybe you can finally clear up an old misunderstanding. You may not even remember how it started, but that's not important now. What matters is to clean up the old mess, so the two of you can get back into having fun and turning a profit together.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper.

ABB posts rise in '98 net income

ZURICH (AFP) — Engineering giant ABB reported an 11 per cent rise in 1998 net profit to \$1.3 billion (1.15 billion euros) with most business segments posting gains despite uncertainties unleashed by volatility of financial markets.

Revenues last year fell by one per cent to \$30.87 billion from \$31.2 billion in 1997, and orders taken dropped by 10 per cent to \$31.5 billion, the group said in a statement.

Profits last year reflect gains from a cost-adjustment programme announced in October 1997, which was fully covered by an \$866 million restructuring charge in that year.

Given high operating cash flow and net income margins, the group forecast that net income in 1999 would exceed the figure last year.

"In a difficult economic environment, orders and revenues for ABB group are expected to increase," the statement said.

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Football leaders attempt to end World Cup boycott

ZURICH (AFP) — The leaders of world football will meet here on Thursday in a bid to find a solution that would end an Asian threat to boycott the finals of the 2002 World Cup.

The 24-man FIFA executive committee have been given until Friday to find an extra spot for an Asian team in the next World Cup — or face a boycott that would severely tarnish football's greatest showcase.

The Asian Football Confederation delivered their ultimatum last December after FIFA announced that there would be only four Asian teams in the finals to be hosted by South Korea and Japan.

That would mean two places for the host nations with two more Asian teams to qualify.

In February, a six-man AFC delegation that included FIFA Vice-president Chung Mong-Joon of South Korea, met with FIFA President Sepp Blatter to push their case.

"We had a very sympathetic hearing," said AFC general secretary Peter Velappan.

But the threat of a boycott was not withdrawn and if an extra place is not found for Asia, AFC members have vowed to carry out their ban.

At the heart of the dispute is FIFA's

decision after the 1998 World Cup to have the winner of the Oceania group play off with a South American team for place in the finals of the World Cup.

Previously it had been an Asian team that had played the Oceania qualifier for the vital spot.

The AFC now want the executive committee to reverse their decision and give them back the extra place.

Asia had three guaranteed representatives at France '98. South Korea, Japan and Saudi Arabia all qualified directly while Iran defeated Australia in a playoff — under the so-called three-and-a-half places formula.

The AFC wants a similar deal where it could have an extra spot through a playoff with another region to end the crisis.

AFC members have made it clear they will not back down following what they consider to be a slight to Asian football.

AFC Vice-president Manilal Fernando of Sri Lanka said: "FIFA is forcing us towards the wall to take drastic decision. We don't want to take such a decision, all we want is a fair deal. FIFA should be fair to us. But we will boycott if we do not get what we want."

Velappan insists Asia is not being unfair in its demand.

"We have a very reasonable request. All we are asking for is half a place. Now it is up to FIFA to do a deal," said Velappan.

But Velappan has warned that if FIFA fail to deliver, the AFC will hold a special congress, probably April, to vote on a boycott.

But whatever happens, the AFC general secretary emphasised that South Korea and Japan would host the finals and nothing would prevent them playing.

Also on the agenda for FIFA's executive committee two-day meeting is a discussion on the outcome of the recent International Olympic Committee-organised conference on doping.

During the meeting in Lausanne last month, Blatter flatly refused to accept calls for an automatic two-year ban on any athletics caught taking performance enhancing drugs.

His stance angered many sports federation heads.

The executive committee now have to decide how FIFA will develop their own anti-doping programme.

Daimler-Chrysler threatens to pull out of Olympics

SYDNEY (AFP) — German car giant DaimlerChrysler has threatened to end three decades of financial support for the Olympic movement because of the growing scandal over Games' finances, a report said here Wednesday.

The merged German and American corporation has told the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that unless it dealt with corruption urgently, it would cut all ties, the Sydney Morning Herald said.

DaimlerChrysler senior vice-president Matthias Kleinert accused the IOC and some national organisations of a "breach of trust" with their corporate sponsors.

"We have said to the IOC that our continued support is conditional on you making a clear plan for creating complete transparency in your finances so everyone can see the money that goes in and the money that goes out," he told the paper's Berlin correspondent.

The Olympic movement is at its lowest point after Salt Lake City's admission of cash and other inducements to at least 25 IOC members in its bid to win the 2002 Winter Games.

The IOC has called a special meeting in Lausanne next week to give its response to the revelations. It is expected to vote on whether to sack six members. Five have already been suspended while four others have quit.

Kleinert said Daimler would make its final decision after that but warned the IOC that if it did not address sponsors' concerns, he would ask for outside auditors to inspect their books.

The car giant has been providing cash and luxury vehicles for the Olympics since 1964.

It had been planning to anchor a ship in Sydney Harbour during the 2000 Games to entertain clients but this is now in doubt, as is a major promotion campaign involving the Sydney Olympics, the paper said.

"Sydney is a great city and I hope we can still go ahead with our plans there," said Kleinert.

"I am planning to write to all the members of our board to ask them to go to Sydney because it is not just a sporting event.

"It will be a world meeting, a stockmarket for business contacts and negotiations."

"It would be a great pity if this does not happen." Daimler is not the first sponsor to threaten action against the IOC.

The Games' 11 biggest sponsors, including McDonald's, Coca-Cola and IBM, have let it be known they are furious with the IOC top brass.

And U.S. firm John Hancock Financial Services, one of America's top 10 insurers, has said it will not run its multi-million dollar advertising campaign unless the IOC cleaned up "the mess in which it finds itself."



Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic eyes the ball during her match against Brie Rippner of the U.S. during 3rd round Evert Cup play in Indian Wells, California. Novotna defeated Rippner 6-1, 6-4 (AFP photo)

Graf and Novotna set to renew long rivalry

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Steffi Graf and Jana Novotna renew their long and lopsided rivalry Wednesday in the quarter finals of the Evert Cup.

Graf, the former World No. 1 and fifth seed, was brimming with confidence after trouncing Japan's Ai Sugiyama 6-0, 6-1 on Tuesday while Novotna, the reigning Wimbledon Champion, pronounced her 6-1, 6-4 win over U.S. qualifier Brie Rippner "comfortable."

Earlier, French sixth seed Mary Pierce captured the last quarter final berth with a dominant 6-1, 6-0 victory over Italian Rita Grande in 46 minutes.

"I went out there with my game plan and I stuck to it," said Pierce, who had a first-round bye and another quick 6-0, 6-3 win over Amy Frazier in the second round.

"People have different outlooks on that," she said. "You can say 'she hasn't had a tough test', but I look at it as I've saved my energy until now."

Pierce set up a clash with 17-year-old Serena Williams, who captured her first WTA Tour title less than two weeks ago in Paris. Williams survived a shaky

second set to beat Zimbabwe's Cara Black 6-0, 7-5.

"She's definitely playing some great tennis," Pierce, ranked eighth in the world, said of Williams. "She's probably got a lot of confidence."

Pierce took a peek at Williams' match on Tuesday and thought she saw some opportunities.

Pierce said her only previous match against Williams was in Chicago two years ago, where she lost to the youngster.

"I'm excited about it," she said of her chance to settle the score. "I've played Venus (Williams) quite a few times in the past year, and I haven't played Serena since Chicago 1997. It's going to be a lot of fun."

Neither Graf nor Novotna were expecting any surprises.

"Playing Steffi, I've done that so many times," Novotna said. "I guess I will just stick to the routine and just do what I do best, which is being aggressive and just hopefully we'll have a good match."

Novotna groaned a little when asked about her head-to-head record against the German, who has won 28 of their 32 encounters.

"I don't even want to know it," Novotna said.

"We've played. I don't know, an incredible amount of times," Graf said. "The last time we played, I think it was at the Chase Championships in November, which we had a very close match."

The last time Novotna beat Graf was at Philadelphia in 1996 — and that was when Graf retired injured.

Graf's performance against Sugiyama didn't bode well for the Czech.

"I had some longer rallies and I felt I was moving very well, anticipating her shots very well," Graf said. "I definitely felt I was going for it. I felt very good."

In the other two quarter-finals, top seed and defending champion Martina Hingis was to take on U.S. veteran Chanda Rubin and France's Sandrine Testud faced Slovakia's Henrieta Nagyova.

Testud ousted eighth-seeded compatriot Nathalie Tauziat in the third round on Monday while Nagyova, ranked 27th in the world, upset third-seeded American Monica Seles.

Kafelnikov falls in bid to unseat Sampras

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Pat Rafter saw their hopes of topping Pete Sampras this week evaporate Tuesday, suffering second-round defeats in the \$2.45 million-Champions Cup.

Australian Open champion Kafelnikov, who has been snapping at Sampras' heels since last month, surrendered a 3-1 lead in the third set to lose to Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten 0-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 in a battle of former French Open champions.

World No. 5 Rafter, whose mathematical chance of overtaking Sampras was slim, lost to 33rd-ranked German Nicolas Kiefer 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 7-5.

All of the top eight seeds had first-round byes, and Sampras was scheduled to open his campaign on Wednesday night against Spain's Felix Mantilla.

Kafelnikov and Rafter were among four players who had a chance to grab the No. 1 ranking from the American this week. Now only third-seeded Alex Corretja and fourth-seeded Carlos Moya, both of Spain, remain.

Corretja, in Sampras' half of the draw, faced a tough second-round match against Australian Mark Philippoussis on Wednesday, while Moya, in the bottom half of the draw, was to play Jim Courier.

Each needs to reach the final to have a chance of supplanting Sampras. "I can't really explain what happened," said a dejected Kafelnikov. "I just lost the focus for a little while."

"Don't get me wrong, I was trying as hard as I could. There's not many times you get a chance to become number one in the world."

Kafelnikov, who also had a chance to grab the top spot in London two weeks ago, said he was more disappointed to make such an early exit from the first of the ATP Tour's prestigious Super Nine events of the year.

"I just wanted to win that match so badly," he said. "I was not thinking about number one in the world, I was thinking about winning that



Yevgeny Kafelnikov from Russia drops the racket as he misses a point during his match against Gustavo Kuerten from Brazil at the Champions Cup in Indian Wells, California (AFP photo)



Brazilian tennis player Gustavo Kuerten returns a backhand against Yevgeny Kafelnikov from Russia at the Champions Cup in Indian Wells, California. Kuerten won 0-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 (AFP photo)

match."

He said he knew that his 6-0 first set win was too easy. "Anytime you win 6-0, you're thinking I might be in danger," he said. "When you win 6-0, that means the guy is not in the game yet."

"Then when you give him a chance... That's basically what happened. I got broken first game (of the second set), it was enough for him to come back to the match, get into the rhythm and start to play better."

Kafelnikov added: "You just don't do those mistakes when you are playing someone like Gustavo."

Once the first set was out of the way, the match became a see-saw affair.

"I think he lost concentration in the middle of the second set," said Kuerten, who led 3-1 in the second. "But I didn't take too much advantage. I had a chance to make it 4-1, but I just did a few little mistakes."

"For me, the worst problem was that when he got up, he started to play really well," Kuerten said.

"The first set, he was leading three-love, he started playing boom, boom, boom, all the shots."

Rafter made 41 unforced errors, double faulting on match point. The two-time reigning U.S. Open champion suffered his third defeat in four matches.

He said he knew coming in that he was unlikely to go all the way. He took off the time between the Australian Open and last week's tournament in Scottsdale, Arizona, to rehabilitate a sore knee.

"I think it's just a matter of not doing the hard work so far," Rafter said.

"I haven't been doing any serving practice since my knee," he added. "This week has been the only time I've done actual serving training. And last week it was bloody awful, my serve. This time it's just awful."

Seventh-seeded Tim Henman advanced smoothly to the third round with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Moroccan Hicham Arazi.

In the third round he could face fellow Briton Greg Rusedski, who was scheduled to play Australian Scott Draper in the second round on Wednesday.

2 more arrested in Premiership match-fixing probe

LONDON (AFP) — Two more men have been arrested in connection with alleged match-fixing in the English Premiership, police said Wednesday.

Scotland Yard said the men were detained at their London homes on Tuesday by detectives investigating claims that floodlights were tampered with as part of a betting scam linked to Far Eastern gambling syndicates.

The latest detentions follow the arrest last month of four men, including a security guard, at Charlton's ground, The Valley, as the club prepared for the visit of Liverpool.

The latest arrests by the Yard's Organised Crime Group were in connection with two matches abandoned after power failures two seasons ago. It is understood the men worked or still work at the grounds.

A Scotland Yard spokesman said: "The two men were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage. "One was detained in

connection with a match between West Ham and Crystal Palace on November 3, 1997, and the other in connection with a game between Wimbledon and Arsenal on December 22 that year."

The first game, at Upton

Park, was called off after 47 minutes when the floodlights failed within seconds of the home side equalising at 2-2.

The second match, at Selhurst Park, was goalless when the floodlights failed in the second half.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNAN HIRSCH
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WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

- Q 1 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
- ♠ 108 974 ♣ KJ7 ♡ A Q 6 3
- The bidding has proceeded: NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
- 1♣ 1♦ 1♥ 1♠
- What action do you take?
- Q 2 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
- ♠ A 6 ♣ A 8 4 ♦ 10762 ♠ J 8 4 3
- The bidding has proceeded: NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
- 1♣ 1♦ 1♥ 1♠
- What do you bid now?
- Q 3 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
- ♠ K 7 ♣ K 7 4 ♦ 10 9 ♡ A K 10 7 4
- Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with three diamonds.
- What action do you take?
- Q 4 - East-West vulnerable, as South you hold:
- ♠ 9 8 4 ♣ 10 9 ♡ A K 5 7 4 2 4 6
- Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with one club. What do you bid now?
- Q 5 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
- ♠ 4 ♣ 9 8 8 2 ♡ A 9 ♡ Q 8 6 4 3
- Partner opens the bidding with one no trump. What do you respond?
- Q 6 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
- ♠ K 3 ♣ A J 10 4 ♡ A K Q 3 ♡ K 6 2
- The bidding has proceeded: NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
- 1♣ 1♦ 1♥ 1♠
- What do you bid now?

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Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

Sports

LOCAL SPORTS

Prince Ali meets league officials

athletics team in training ground

handball team loses

Basketball event before Games

SCORE

Italian Cup

French

English

Dutch

German

CAR FOR RENT

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Prince Ali meets Premier League officials

AMMAN — HRH Prince Ali, president of the Jordan Football Association (JFA), Wednesday received presidents of the Premier League clubs for talks on their demands and problems facing them. During the meeting, Prince Ali, who was recently appointed as JFA president, stressed the importance of improving the level of soccer in the Kingdom. The club presidents stressed that the training of the national team should not affect local soccer activities and urged the JFA to reconsider the JFA's legislation and the process of distributing Premier League's revenue.

Athletics team in search of training ground

AMMAN — The Jordan Athletics Federation's (JAF) technical committee will meet on Saturday with trainers to determine a suitable place for training after Amman Stadium was closed for maintenance. JAF President Fu'ad Kaddoumi said the federation lacks a training track for the high jump athletes, for whom the JAF has recently enlisted a Ukrainian trainer for a monthly salary of \$2,500. Meanwhile, the federation is still awaiting the Ministry of Sports and Youth's approval for its participation in Iran's Marathon, where 11 Jordanian athletes will represent the Kingdom next month.

Handball team leaves for Croatia

AMMAN — The men's national handball team Friday leaves for Croatia to hold a nine-day training camp, during which the team will play six friendlies against Croatian clubs as part of preparations for the 9th Pan-Arab Games — Al Hussein Tournament.

Basketball event might start before Games

AMMAN — The Jordan Basketball Federation will request the Jordan Olympic Committee to bring forward the date of the basketball event at the Pan-Arab Games to August 10, to enable it to end the competition before the men's 20th Asian Championship which will be held in Japan August 28 - September 9.



WBA heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield of the U.S. has his legs massaged before the start of his sparring session at the Church Street Gym in New York. Holyfield is preparing for his fight against WBC champion Lennox Lewis of Great Britain to be held at Madison Square Garden on Saturday (AFP photo)

SCOREBOARD

NBA		
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Milwaukee	87	New York 86
Minnesota	85	Seattle 84
Chicago	103	New Jersey 87
Phoenix	103	Dallas 91
Houston	84	Denver 75
Utah	88	Cleveland 75
Portland	103	Sacramento 98
Golden State	92	Vancouver 82
LA Lakers	103	LA Clippers 99

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Nancy 2 Bordeaux 3

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IOC investigator arrives to deliver report

LAUSANNE (AFP) — The fate of at least 13 International Olympic Committee members under investigation in relation to the Salt Lake City scandal could be known within 24 hours.

Dick Pound, the IOC's chief investigator into the scandal, arrived in Lausanne on Wednesday where he is expected to deliver his report on the corruption that riddled the American city's successful bid to host the 2002 Winter Games.

Pound is a Canadian lawyer and IOC executive board member who has chaired the six-man inquiry panel into the alleged misconduct.

The IOC is to hold a special general assembly here next week at which several members face expulsion.

The commission has been considering the cases of 13 members, including three who remained under investigation when the initial part of the inquiry concluded in January — when nine members were expelled or resigned.

The three who remain under investigation are Kim Un-yong of Korea, Louis Guirandou-N'Daye of the Ivory Coast and Vitaly Smirnov of Russia.

Pound said another 10 members had been implicated in fresh reports from Salt Lake City where 2002 Winter Games organisers have admitted they spent \$1.2 million in cash payments, scholarships, free medical care and other inducements.

Pan-Arab Games gets additional \$300,000 as 16 countries confirmed

By Aileen Bannayan

AMMAN — Isam Aridah, the director of the 9th Pan-Arab Games (Al Hussein Tournament), returns home today after having secured an additional \$300,000 in sponsorship from the Council of Arab Sports Ministers following meetings which ended in Cairo Thursday.

This brings the total amount of aid granted so far to \$500,000 after having received another \$200,000 last year.

During his recent tour of Egypt and Tunisia, Aridah briefed Arab League officials on the latest preparations for the Games which will be held in Amman Aug. 15-31.

Meanwhile, the number of countries having confirmed participation rose to 16.

They are in addition to the hosts, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Kuwait, Qatar, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Sudan, Oman, Lebanon and Palestine have not finalised the nature of participation while organisers were still awaiting initial word from the UAE and Bahrain.

Sari Hamdan, chief of the Jordan Olympic Committee's (JOC) technical committee said a final word from participating countries was expected this month, after an earlier Dec. 31 deadline was not met.

"We have to know the nature of participation and the final number of teams and events for the success of all organisational aspects," Hamdan noted explaining that any event with less than five teams for men and four for women will be cancelled.



expected the strain between Gulf countries and Iraq to also affect the Games.

With only five months remaining the building of sports facilities is said to be on time: mainly the construction of a JD4 million multi-purpose indoor stadium with a 7,000-seat capacity, and the Olympic-size swimming pool which has come under heavy criticism for not being covered to be utilised in winter.

However, work on the track and field stadium, in addition to installing and upgrading facilities with electronic timing machines and other requirements was moving at a slower pace.

Moreover, JOC officials have recently expressed concern that the other main point as host country was the inadequate and lax attitude of some federations overseeing the training of athletes.

Grappling with a host of administrative and organisational issues seems to have shifted the focus from this technical aspect of the event.

That concern was echoed by Mohammad Kheir Mansour, who took over the portfolio of Sports and Youth in the newly appointed Cabinet, and immediately announced an emergency plan to activate all committees and "get the ball rolling."

"Quite simply, some committees have not started to do their job. They either need to be reactivated or annulled," Jordan Olympic Committee (JOC) Vice President Mouaffaq Al Fawwaz told the Jordan Times in a recent interview.

The last regional event Jordan took part in was the 13th Asian Games in Bangkok in December, where Jordan only managed five medals, four by the

They will also try to garner more support from the Gulf Cooperation Council and other states able to sponsor the mega-event and enable the Kingdom to prepare infrastructure and update sports facilities.

Officials said additional sponsorship for Jordan's bid will be amassed through lowering the 50 per cent ASF margin of profit on promotion and television coverage.

taekwondo team. The rest of the athletes failed to even match their own national records.

Mansour met with representatives of sports federations Wednesday to make sure everything was going ahead as planned with practice, training camps and assessment on their short-term agendas.

The Ministerial Committee charged with overseeing the Kingdom's preparations underlined their support for the Amman Games, saying that they would recommend to the Arab League that Jordan receive additional funding and assistance.

Since the Arab Sports Federation (ASF) advanced the date of the upcoming Games to 1999 instead of 2001, the council has been trying to boost aid to the Kingdom.

They will also try to garner more support from the Gulf Cooperation Council and other states able to sponsor the mega-event and enable the Kingdom to prepare infrastructure and update sports facilities.

Officials said additional sponsorship for Jordan's bid will be amassed through lowering the 50 per cent ASF margin of profit on promotion and television coverage.

The Jordanian government had initially earmarked JD18 million for the event. Lebanon, which hosted the 8th Pan-Arab Games in 1997, received \$28 million from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to help in construction of sport facilities destroyed during the civil war.

Bucks edge Knicks, Ewing hurt

NEW YORK (R) — Dell Curry drilled a 3-pointer with 3.4 seconds left to lift the Milwaukee Bucks to their fifth straight win and second dramatic victory over the New York Knicks in five days, 87-86 on Tuesday.

Patrick Ewing left with Achilles tendinitis just 29 seconds into the game but the Knicks opened a 78-71 advantage with 7:45 to go. The Bucks used an 11-4 surge, capped by Glenn Robinson's 3-pointer, to draw even at 82-82 with 2:02 remaining.

Then, down 86-84, Robinson drove the lane and dished to a wide-open Curry in the right corner. He drained the three-pointer. The Knicks had one last shot, but Latrell Sprewell's 3-pointer as time expired hit the back of the rim.

Ewing was taken to a hospital and given a magnetic resonance imaging exam. After the game, the Knicks said no tendon damage was found and his condition was day to day.

Ewing suffered the worst injury of his career against the Bucks last season, when

he dislocated a bone in his right wrist. That injury forced him to miss the final 56 games of the regular season and a portion of the playoffs.

Robinson scored 27 points for the Bucks, who also defeated the Knicks by one point five days ago.

In Minneapolis, for the first time since Kevin Garnett was 14 years old, the Minnesota Timberwolves defeated the Seattle SuperSonics at home.

Garnett punctuated a fourth-quarter double-double with a follow dunk with 18 seconds left, giving the Timberwolves an emotional 85-84 victory over the SuperSonics, their first at home in the series since December 30, 1990.

The 22-year-old four-year veteran had 22 points, 16 rebounds, six assists and four blocks. He had 12 points and 11 boards in the final period and rescued the Wolves after they squandered a six-point lead in the final three minutes.

Seattle lost its fourth straight, its longest losing streak since 1992. It had won 15 straight visits to Minnesota.

In Charlotte, Paul Silas, in his first game as Hornets coach since Dave Cowens resigned, used a makeshift lineup and notched an unlikely 105-87 victory over the Boston Celtics, the team with which he won two championships.

The Hornets were already long missing Glen Rice and Anthony Mason, and top scorer and rebounder Derrick Coleman missed his second straight game with a sprained right foot and guard Bobby Phillips sat with left leg injury.

In Chicago, Toni Kukoc scored 18 of his 28 points in the second half as the Bulls broke the century mark for the first time this season and routed the New Jersey Nets 103-87.

With the dismantled

championship team reaching 100 points in the win, each fan at the United Centre who stayed to the end of the game between the worst teams in the Eastern Conference received a coupon for a free taco.

Chicago is now 5-13, New Jersey 3-14.

In Dallas, the Phoenix Suns wiped the floor with the Mavericks, pulling away in the fourth quarter for a 103-91 victory.

The game was delayed due to a film solution on the court.

In Los Angeles, the

Clippers matched the worst start in team history, 0-16, and moved to within one loss of the worst in league history, falling to the Lakers 103-99.

Shaquille O'Neal had 31 points and 12 rebounds and Dennis Rodman grabbed a season-high 20 boards as the Lakers ran their winning streak to eight games.

At Utah, Jerry Sloan returned to the sidelines and the Jazz returned to their winning ways.

Sloan, who missed the last two games (both losses) recuperating from arthro-

scopic knee surgery, guided the Jazz to an 88-75 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers as Karl Malone scored 21 points.

In Portland, Isaiah Rider scored 13 of his 21 points in the second half as the NBA-best Trail Blazers (15-3) defeated the Sacramento Kings 103-98 for their eighth straight win.

In Houston, Hakeem Olajuwon scored 20 points and the Rockets kept the Denver Nuggets winless away from home with an 84-75 victory.

At Golden State, Donyell Marshall had 20 points and 10 rebounds as the Warriors handed the Vancouver Grizzlies their ninth straight loss, 92-82.

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Iranian president meets with Pope today Khatami advocates democracy, urges end to terrorism, violence

ROME (AFP) — Iranian President Mohammad Khatami spoke in favour of democracy and an end to terrorism here Wednesday, as protests continued to mar his visit, the first by an Iranian leader to Western Europe since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

"I am convinced of the absolute necessity of finding a way to establish democracy worldwide and to refuse all forms of dictatorship. The world is tired of continuing violence and terrorism," Khatami told journalists.

His comments followed an hour-long meeting with Italian Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema here on the second day of a three-day visit.

D'Alema said Italy and Europe hoped "to build relations on the basis of principles and values and not just reciprocal interests. Those principles — democracy, a respect for human rights and freedom — are for us irrevocable," he said.

Earlier, 13 people were arrested after protesters hurled

paint at a car carrying Khatami, police said.

Their identities and nationalities were not disclosed.

Police said some were in possession of eggs filled with paint when they were detained. At least two eggs filled with yellow paint hit Khatami's car.

In another incident, three Iranian nationals, reportedly carrying posters hostile to Khatami, were detained in front of the monument to the Unknown Soldier, where the Iranian leader was to place a wreath.

Security is tight for the visit. Khatami arrived in Rome early Tuesday, where he was met by Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini and later held talks with President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro.

His visit has prompted protests by thousands of demonstrators, mostly Iranians living in exile.

Organisers said more than 5,000 people responded to appeals by the Iranian opposition People's Mujahadeen and

Italian right-wing opposition parties Forza Italia and the National Alliance to protest.

"The West is wrong to think it is welcoming a new Gorbachev," Behzad Naziri, a representative of the People's Mujahadeen, said.

"Khatami is not there to overturn the Islamic Revolution but to prevent it from being swept away," Naziri said.

Dini defended the decision to meet Khatami, insisting that Iran had decreased its financial support for terrorism. Khatami, he said, "has condemned terrorism as a tool in political battles."

Former Iranian Ambassador to Italy Perviz Khazai, living in exile, said: "Iran is still exporting terrorism." He said since Khatami's election in May 1997, 28 Iranian dissidents had been assassinated abroad.

A number of Italian deputies also participated in Tuesday's protest, including Sandra Fel of the National Alliance, who called the visit "scandalous"

and decried the regime's "discrimination against women."

Before leaving Tehran, Khatami, who is accompanied by Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi and Mines and Metals Minister Eshagh Jahanghi, said he hoped his trip would lead to better relations with Italy and Europe.

The trip is focused on economic relations at a time when Iran is suffering from a slump in the price of its main export commodity, oil.

Iranian officials accompanying Khatami met executives of the Italian oil giant Eni Wednesday.

Tehran newspapers have hailed the trip as a turning point in relations between Iran and Europe, which has resisted joining the United States in its campaign to isolate the Islamic regime for its alleged support of terrorism.

Khatami later left Rome for Florence, where he is to address academics. He is due to meet Pope John Paul II on Thursday.



FLOODS HIT HUNGARY: The Castle of Tiszadob, some 180 kilometres northeast of Budapest, is surrounded Wednesday by the floods of Tisza River. Rising floodwaters have forced the evacuation of almost 1,000 people in northeastern Hungary in recent days, and the situation is getting worse (AP photo)

Demirel backs abolishing courts with military judges

ANKARA (AP) — President Suleyman Demirel said Wednesday he favours amending the constitution to abolish courts that include military judges and have been criticised as not being fully independent.

Imprisoned Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan is to be tried by a state security court which includes a military judge on its panel. He risks the death penalty on a charge of treason.

The Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights has questioned the impartiality of such courts.

"Why should we be put in a position where we are considered to be in the wrong, when

in fact we are right," Demirel told reporters, adding that parliament should amend the constitution — a relic of the 1980 military coup — after the elections set for April 18.

However, chances that parliament would abolish the courts were considered slim, and certainly not in time for Ocalan's trial, expected to take place this spring.

Turkey, meanwhile, has sent a letter to the European court outlining Ocalan's detention conditions after the court asked Turkey to clarify how Ocalan was captured and describe his treatment on a heavily guarded prison island where he is being

kept.

Turkey said Ocalan, who had been hiding in the Greek embassy in Nairobi, was captured by Kenyan officials and handed over to Turkish authorities at Nairobi's airport, according to a European court official in Strasbourg who read the letter. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

Ocalan is being held in a 13-square-metre cell with access to hot and cold water. He has access to an open-air yard and reading material and was given a radio, according to the letter.

Demirel also renewed a call on Greece to end support to Ocalan's Kurdish Labour Party

or PKK.

Demirel said Athens should close down camps where PKK militants were allegedly being trained, extradite wanted guerrillas, not provide arms and put an end to their illegal border crossings. Greece has denied that it houses such camps or has provided arms and aid to the rebels.

On Wednesday, lawyer Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu was handed over documents signed by the rebel leader appointing him and his brother, Selim Okcuoglu, as Ocalan's legal representatives. It was not clear when they would be allowed to see Ocalan.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Qadhafi advises Arafat to delay state

CAIRO (AFP) — Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi on Wednesday advised Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to delay the planned May 4 declaration of a Palestinian state. "As a diplomat I advise Arafat not to proclaim this state in order to secure European recognition" for such a state at a later date, Qadhafi said during a meeting here with Cairo University students and professors. "We were patient for dozens of years and we can be patient for six more months or even more," the Libyan leader said.

11 PKK members killed in clashes

DIYARBAKIR (AFP) — Clashes between Turkish security forces and separatist Kurdish rebels in three southeastern Turkish provinces have claimed 12 lives, the regional governor's office said on Wednesday. Eight members of the Kurdistan Labour Party (PKK) were killed in an operation launched in the mountainous rural areas of the Tunceli province. Three more rebels were killed in fighting in the Diyarbakir and Bingol provinces, added a statement from the governor's office. The clashes also claimed the lives of a member of the Turkish forces, it said.

Arafat to meet Blair on Mideast peace

LONDON (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will hold talks Thursday in London with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the Middle East peace process, officials said. A spokesman for Blair's Downing Street office said they would discuss the situation in the Middle East. Palestinian sources here said Arafat would be calling on Blair to put more pressure on Israel to bow to Palestinian calls for statehood and to implement last October's Wye River accords in full.

Saudi defence minister to visit Iran

TEHRAN (AFP) — Saudi Arabia's defence minister, Prince Sultan Ben Abdul Aziz, will make the first-ever visit by a Saudi defence chief to Iran in April, the Iranian defence ministry said Wednesday. "The visit will help strengthen cooperation between the two nations and create an atmosphere of greater trust," ministry spokesman Kevyan Khosravi said, quoted by the official news agency IRNA. The Saudi defence minister will bring a high-level military and political delegation for talks with Iranian officials, he said.

Islamist party spokesman released

GAZA CITY (AFP) — A spokesman of the Islamic Salvation Party, Razi Hamad, was released here Tuesday after being detained for five days, Palestinian officials said. Hamad was first arrested by Palestinian police Thursday, along with 10 other leaders of the party. They were all released Saturday, but preventative security agents immediately rearrested Hamad. Another 15 party activists arrested last week were released Monday. The party, considered a political wing of the radical Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), angered the authorities by criticising the Palestinian state security court.

Man in Iran dies during raid by police

TEHRAN (AP) — A physician in Iran died of a heart attack when the vice police burst into his home looking for an illicit satellite dish antenna, a Tehran newspaper reported Wednesday. The physician, identified only as Dr. Pakdel, suffered a heart seizure and died on the way to the hospital after the raid in the north-western city of Tabriz, the Jahan-e-Islam daily reported. The Farsi-language newspaper did not say when the raid took place. It quoted an official of the anti-vice headquarters in Tabriz as saying that agents entered the physician's home with a search warrant.

Saddam could be removed by 2001 — U.S. official

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. efforts to remove Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from office could bear fruit by January 2001, a top U.S. State Department official told a Senate panel Tuesday.

Under fire from senators questioning whether such a change could come before President Bill Clinton leaves office, Elizabeth Jones, principal assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, replied "it's entirely possible."

Jones was defending the Clinton administration's Iraq policy from tough criticism by two Republican senators, who charged not enough was being done to bring about Saddam's ouster.

"We're wasting a tremendous opportunity here" by not pushing harder for the Iraqi leader's removal at a time when there seems to be broad support for it, stressed Republican Senator Sam Brownback.

Brownback, who chairs the panel to which Jones testified, also deplored limiting U.S. action to striking Iraqi installations that target American and British jets patrolling "no-fly zones" in Iraq.

Any campaign to remove Saddam requires "aggressive U.S. leadership" without which it "may take several years, it may take 10 years," added Brownback.

Republican Senator John Ashcroft, meanwhile, said the White House has "not spent a single dollar" to train and equip Iraqi opposition despite the \$97 million that could fund such an effort under a U.S. budget provision.

Jones painted a different picture of American policy, saying Washington was "working actively and aggressively" to bring about Saddam's removal, but stressing the need to rally opposition groups before training and equipping them.

PARIS (AFP) — A special court on Wednesday sentenced in absentia six suspected Libyan agents to life in prison for the mid-air bombing of a French airliner in which 170 people died in 1989.

The seven judges deliberated for two and a half hours before handing down the verdict in the absence of the defendants who would be allowed a new trial should they later turn themselves in or be handed over by Libya.

The DC-10 UTA airliner exploded on September 19, 1989 over the Sahara Desert in Niger while on a flight from Brazzaville, Congo, to Paris.

Families of the victims expressed relief at the court's ruling.

Among the six accused is Abdullah Senoussi, the 47-year-old brother-in-law of Qadhafi, alleged to have planned the bombing in his role as number two in the secret service.

The others are Abdullah Elazragh, a Libyan diplomat aged 65 posted in Brazzaville at the time, Ibrahim Naefi, 40, Musbah Arbas, 47, Abdul Salam Hammouda, 43, Senoussi's former top aide, and Abdul Salam Shibani, 50.

Their conviction in the three-day trial means they may never set foot out of Libya as they would face immediate arrest. Under French law their absence at the trial meant that they could not have lawyers contest the charges.

Senoussi's attorney Francois Gibault said he was not surprised by the ruling as it was common procedure in France to hand down maximum sentences when defendants are tried in absentia.

"It's a salvo by the prosecution and the civil parties with the defence absent from the proceedings," he said, adding that his client was targeted only because of his relation to the Libyan leader.

"It is not common procedure under international law to get at a head of state through one of his family members," Gibault said.

Libya has been under international sanctions since 1992 for its alleged support of international terrorism following the attack on the UTA flight and the 1988 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, of a Pan Am airliner which left 270 people dead.

The UTA plane, which was on its way from Brazzaville to Paris after a stopover in Ndjamena, the capital of Chad, was blown up allegedly in a "Libyan plot" aimed at harming France's role in Africa.

French authorities opted for the formula of a trial in absentia, after anti-terrorist Magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguiere was allowed to visit Tripoli, returning with a replica of the booby-trapped suitcase that blew up the UTA and Pan Am planes.

The replica was provided by the Libyan authorities.

Bruguiere investigated the possibility that the attack on the UTA airliner was the work of the Palestine Liberation Organisation or Islamist groups close to Iran or Syria, or linked to Bernard Yanga, a jailed member of the Congolese opposition. But he ruled them all out.

Suspected Libyan agents get life for bombing French airliner

Serb radical thanks Macedonians for beating Brits

BELGRADE (R) — Serbia's ultra-nationalist Deputy Prime Minister Vojislav Seselj has sent a message congratulating the staff of a Macedonian restaurant for beating up British soldiers, his office said Wednesday.

A British military spokesman said 22 British troops were involved in an incident outside a restaurant in the Macedonian capital Skopje last Thursday that left one soldier in hospital. Belgrade's pro-government press has reported that five Macedonian waiters beat up drunken British commandos. Seselj congratulated the waiters for their bravery. "The whole of Serbia is delighted with the lesson you taught the English occupiers. This valiant action is a real token of Serb-Macedonian friendship," Seselj wrote to the restaurant owner.

Romanian wants Monica declared persona non grata

BUCHAREST (AFP) — A Romanian deputy called Wednesday for former White House intern Monica Lewinsky to be declared persona non grata in the country because of her "doubtful morality." "The scandalous behaviour of this person who turned her affair with President Bill Clinton into a lucrative business [is] liable to tarnish the image of the American people," said opposition MP Nicolae Popa. Other Romanian deputies agreed. "A woman who boasts about her sexual relations does not deserve so much attention," said Christian Democrat deputy Dan Barboresco. But he added: "Bill Clinton on the other hand can come whenever he wants."

'Electronic' Khatami disappears

TEHRAN (AFP) — A high-tech electronic portrait of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami was stolen from a busy Tehran square after the city government received anonymous threats from outraged callers. The Tehran municipality received a series of "rude and threatening phone calls" about the eight-square-metre electronic Khatami, which also displayed the date and time in northern Tehran's congested Quds Square. But after authorities declined to take action, thieves took the president into their own hands and made off with the sign, the Khordad paper reported Tuesday. It said the sign was worth some \$12,500.

Fashion on a roll with toilet-paper wedding gown

PARIS (AFP) — The first wedding-gown to be fashioned out of Japanese toilet paper is to feature on the catwalks when French couture house Leonard unveils his collection next Sunday. The gown, covered in roses, was designed in homage to lyrical French Renaissance poet Pierre de Ronsard, known for his sonnet on roses, said Leonard designer Daniel Tribouillard. Why Japanese toilet-paper? "Because it's very strong and transparent," he said.

Expert says jail is secret of Monopoly

LONDON (AFP) — A mathematician claims to have figured out the secret of success at Monopoly. It's all about what your opponents do after leaving jail, John Haigh devised a computer programme which made more than 10 million rolls of the dice to find out which squares are statistically most popular. The "Go to Jail" corner was the most visited. So Haigh calculated he should build his property empire on the orange and red squares clustered around the parking lot at the corner after the jail, as that was where opponents would most likely land after leaving jail. Haigh's findings showed that green and light blue squares are the least profitable because they are far from the jail.

Lonely hearts column brings together lovelorn Palestinians

By Khalil Abed Rabo
Agence France Presse

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM — For lovelorn Palestinians there is only one place to turn to find Mister or Miss Right — the lonely hearts columns of the monthly magazine Fusta, which is now known as the top match-maker in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Traditionally Palestinian marriages have been arranged by parents or by marriage-brokers who do not allow a couple to meet and to get to know one another before becoming formally engaged.

Adverts are placed in Fusta's pages by men and women who are desperate to marry but who want to escape the clutch of their families.

In the five years since the idea for the column came to features editor Mohammad Sbeih, the magazine has carried more than 5,000 adverts offering marriage.

"We wanted to provide a channel for people who wanted to get married through unconventional channels, for people who wanted to get

to know one another before becoming engaged while remaining within the bounds of decency set by society," Sbeih told AFP.

In its early days religious zealots flayed the magazine in sermons throughout the Palestinian territories, criticising Fusta for polluting local society with Western values.

To keep critics at bay, the magazine has tough requirements before it accepts advertisements. Would-be suitors have to submit a full personal resume, copies of their identity card and several references.

Fusta's rigour works. Women form the overwhelming majority of advertisers and are, according to Sbeih, five times more likely to place an ad than men.

Sbeih said there are a number of factors at work to explain the imbalance, foremost among them the fact that Palestinian society makes it much easier for young men than it does for women to move about freely and search for a wife.

"There is also a view in conservative circles that by the age of 20 a

woman who has not married will never marry. So what do you think a woman in her mid-twenties does? It's a disaster. So she clutches at straws — anything not to be seen by her family and friends as being left on the shelf," Sbeih says.

Top of the list of attributes for the knight in shining armour desired by most Palestinian women is, it seems, money — and lots of it. Wealth heads the requirements for more than 70 per cent of those who place ads, while high levels of education are the least requested, Sbeih said.

For men beauty is the number one stipulation, with advertisers wanting features which would test a supermodel.

Men also request that the beloved should not have had "previous experiences," which usually means she has not even stepped out with another man.

Economics also plays a role, with many men asking that a correspondent should have either an Israeli passport or a Jerusalem

identity card.

If she does, then the would-be husband can live in Jerusalem or Israel, where there are far more opportunities to work than in the Palestinian territories.

Nabil, 32, is one of the successful bridegrooms who met his wife through Fusta's pages.

"I spent 15 years in [an Israeli] prison. When I got out my wife and I had a lot of problems and we divorced... I didn't want to go through the normal family channels and get married again to a girl I didn't know," he said.

"I wanted to marry someone whom I had got to know before getting engaged," he said.

Nabil started by speaking for hours with several women who replied to his ad without finding someone whom he really liked.

Then in January Aida called.

The two talked on the phone every day for two weeks, sometimes several times a day, until they were satisfied that they had a good deal in common before Nabil popped the question.

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...Czech Republic...

...Hungary, Poland...

...join NATO...

...Gas wells explode...

...near Bombay...

...Levy punishes...

...sensors for refusing...

...anthrax shots...

...One killed in...

...clash in Nigeria...

...Frozen grave of...

...nomad discovered...